

A novel by Joan D. Vinge

Based On The Screenplay By
Walter Murch and Gill Dennis

8 pages of
fabulous color photos
from the movie

Now a major motion picture from
Walt Disney Pictures

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DEL REY

OZ is

Of that Dorothy Gale was sure.

No matter that Aunt Em and Uncle Henry had tried to convince her that her visit to the magical land was all in her mind, merely the result of the head injury she suffered during that dreadful tornado. Now she must put all thoughts of OZ behind her and deal with the real world . . .

And they almost had her convinced . . .

Then Dorothy found a key with the OZ insignia on it, and she knew OZ was real and that the friends she had left there—the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Woodman, and her beloved Scarecrow—needed her.

During a raging storm, Dorothy is hurled back to OZ, which now lies under the spell of the evil Nome King and his accomplice the wicked witch Mombi.

Together with her faithful companion Billina the talking hen, Dorothy sets out on an adventure, filled with excitement and fraught with danger, to find the rightful ruler of OZ!

HAVE GUMP, WILL TRAVEL . . .

As Dorothy slept and the Gump flew on through the night, his wings beating tirelessly, Mombi sat on her golden throne, all alone in the silent palace, moodily plucking her mandolin. She could not sleep, knowing that Dorothy Gale and her chicken had outwitted her and escaped. They were heading for the Nome King's mountain—and if the Wheelers didn't stop them, her position as the ruler of the Emerald City, and her own head, would be no more secure then the heads she kept locked in her cabinets.

The Wheelers must *stop them! Even if the Emerald City was an empty ruin, it was* her *ruin and she was not going to let a little girl and a chicken ruin it all!*

WALT DISNEY
PICTURES

PRESENTS

Return To Oz

Starring NICOL WILLIAMSON,
JEAN MARSH • PIPER LAURIE
Introducing FAIRUZA BALK
Music by DAVID SHIRE
Director of Photography DAVID WATKIN
Screenplay by
WALTER MURCH • GILL DENNIS
Executive Producer GARY KURTZ
Produced by PAUL MASLANSKY
Directed by WALTER MURCH



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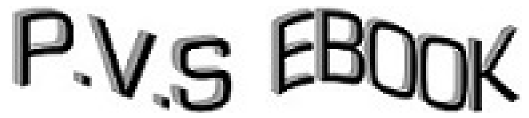


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TO SARAH
AND PHILLIP
WITH LOVE


Return To
OZ

CHAPTER 1

The stars lay like a sparkling blanket across the vast, empty blackness of the Kansas sky. The full moon rolled peacefully through the night toward dawn, silvering the endless fields and grasslands, silhouetting the skeletal form of the half-built farmhouse that rested, solitary and silent, among them.

Nine-year-old Dorothy Gale lay wide awake in her bed, in the single bedroom of the half-finished house, staring into the darkness. It seemed to her that she had heard those whispering voices perfectly clearly, only moments ago, just before she had awakened. They were telling her of a land called Oz, calling her . . .

Now, all she could hear was the rustle of dry leaves. But she had had this dream so many times before that she *knew.* She lay rigidly beneath the heavy quilts, gazing out into the cluttered room, which seemed to glow in the moonlight. She felt the warm, unmoving presence of Toto, lying sound asleep and curled up against her toes.

Abruptly the door to her room opened, and the golden light of a kerosene lantern blazed in the doorway. Dorothy lifted a hand to her eyes, as her Aunt Em walked softly into the bedroom and sat down beside her on the bed. Shadows danced along the walls from the lantern's flame, leapfrogged over the looming shapes of too many pieces of furniture crowded into the small room. Aunt Em, her face lined but still beautiful, gazed down at Dorothy.

Em smoothed the long, tangled hair back from her niece's mournful face; even by lantern light, she could see glints of mahogany among the dark brown strands. Sighing as she thought of the gray that was stealing into her own once-bright hair, she struggled to control the sudden anger rising inside her that had nothing to do with a troubled child's nightmares. "A bad dream?" she asked finally.

Dorothy shook her head, her blue eyes wide and solemn.

"It's past one o'clock in the morning, Dorothy," Em said, more sharply than she had intended. They had had this conversation far too often in the past weeks . . . the past months. Six months had passed since the tornado destroyed the farm, but its black finger of destruction still haunted their lives. Their old house had been carried away by the storm, and their new house was still barely half done; but that was not the worst of it. It was not the loss of worldly things that mattered in life—her father had always told her—it was the loss of the spirit.

Em was a good Christian woman; her father had been a minister, and he had taught her to trust in the Lord's judgment. She had tried to lead a good life, raising her sister's child as her own after her sister died. She loved little Dorothy as dearly as if she were her own, the child she and Henry had never been blessed with. But life on a Kansas farm had always been one of trials, disappointments, and never-ending work. And now, she had thought the worst had finally happened. Things should have started looking up by now; but somehow nothing seemed to be getting any better. She felt her patience and her loved ones slipping away, and it frightened her.

Reaching deep into herself, she remembered her own long-ago, happy girlhood back in southern Ohio and suddenly thought of her mother, and found the smile she had been seeking. "Want me to paint your face?" she asked quietly.

Dorothy nodded her head, closing her eyes, snuggling closer to her aunt's side beneath the quilts.

Em began to brush the small, round face gently with her fingertips, touching Dorothy's forehead . . . eyebrows . . . nose . . . cheeks . . . in a soothing ritual her own mother had performed with her. As she touched each part of Dorothy's face, she murmured a color: "Forehead . . . white; eyebrows . . . blue; nose . . . crimson; cheeks . . . magenta."

Dorothy opened her eyes. "What's magenta?"

"It's a kind of pink," Em said.

A sound at the doorway made them both glance up. Em's husband, Henry, stood gazing in through the half-open door. She realized that he had been standing there for some moments, listening, unnoticed. The harsh shadows cast by the lantern flame accentuated the deep lines in his face. Em was struck suddenly by how old he looked. At forty-eight he was four years older than she, a middle-aged man. But in the past six months he had become an old man, his once-lean face now almost gaunt, his proud eyes dim, his strong back stooped beneath an invisible burden. He had even let his beard grow; not even bothering enough about himself to shave. As her eyes met his, he moved away down the hall without speaking.

"I wish . . ." Dorothy whispered suddenly, beside her.

Em glanced back at her. "What, precious?"

Dorothy laughed, her eyes filling with tears as she looked down at her dog, still sleeping in perfect peace at the foot of the bed. "I wish I could put my head on my paws and go to sleep like Toto."

Em pulled herself up from the bed and gazed down at her niece, pulling the worn patchwork quilt up underneath Dorothy's chin and smoothing it with callused, gentle hands. "Soon you will," she murmured, "soon you will." She picked up the lantern and left the

room as quietly as she had come in.

Em walked back down the hallway to the kitchen, the only other room of the house that was finished enough to be livable. It served as a sitting room and a bedroom for Henry and herself, as well as the place where she had to cook. Even the day's laundry had to be hung here to dry, now that the weather had turned cold.

The glow of another lantern met her as she entered the room. Henry was sitting at the table instead of lying in bed, even though the chill in the room was uncomfortable. She saw that he was looking at the advertisement again, the one she had clipped from the newspaper.

ANNOUNCEMENT! ELECTRIC HEALING! it read, in large, embellished type. She had shown it to Henry earlier that evening, shortly after Dorothy had been put to bed, and he had been brusquely unreceptive. The fact that he was looking at it again, now, gave her new hope and fresh resolve. She extinguished the lantern and set it down.

Henry looked up at her, as if he had already been over half the argument again in his mind. "How're you going to pay out money for this doctor if we don't have it?"

"Garnet said she'd loan it to us," Em said firmly. Before she had even discussed the matter with him, she had made her own decision and worked out a way to make it possible. But she still wanted the support of his approval; and he was the only one who could make up his own mind. The wind crooned eerily in the flue of the stove, and Em rubbed her arms.

Henry shook his head, with a frown furrowing between his brows. "That's charity, Em."

"She's my sister," Em said, repeating the words she had gone over in her mind again and again. "It's family. It's not charity." Her exasperation and her anger began to rise again, but this time she didn't try to control her feelings. "Hen, I got just about all the trouble I can handle. The tornado was six months ago, and Dorothy's not been herself since. I'm taking her to town tomorrow to see if she can be helped."

Back in her bedroom, Dorothy lay motionless, straining to hear the barely audible words that seeped through the cracks of her closed door. She heard Aunt Em's soft, familiar voice rising in rare anger, ". . . someplace that doesn't exist! . . . scarecrows! . . . talking tin men . . . lost a pair of ruby slippers . . ." Talking about the land of Oz.

Dorothy's eyes filled again with hot, unshed tears. They didn't believe her. They didn't understand. They thought everywhere was just like Kansas. She sat up, pushing the covers back, and leaned forward until she could reach Toto. She stroked his soft, curly brown fur, staring at the starry sky reflected in her mirror.

As she watched, a streak of light cut across the still, glittering heavens, falling toward the earth. Dorothy turned quickly to look out the window. But all was still and silent in the night beyond. Toto nuzzled her foot as he stirred in his sleep. Dorothy stroked his back again, still gazing out the window. “A shooting star, Toto,” she whispered. “A shooting star.” She closed her eyes and made a wish. Then she lay down beneath the covers again with a sigh, knowing that now she was ready for sleep at last.

CHAPTER 2

Toto burst out of the kitchen door, delighted to be set free into the brisk, sunny autumn morning. The sun was high already, but Dorothy had only just gotten up and eaten breakfast, and so had he. He ran barking among the chickens who were pecking after corn in the yard. Dorothy rushed outside after him, scolding him halfheartedly. She couldn't blame him for his excitement on such a beautiful fall day, when the air was as crisp as fresh red apples. She was just as glad as he was to escape into the yard, forgetting last night's troubled dreams and the unhappy conversation she had had with her aunt at breakfast.

She shooed Toto away from the chickens, clapping her hands as she saw her favorite hen scuttle frantically underneath a crate. Dorothy made her way through the ruffled and indignant white Leghorns to pick up the yellow-orange Plymouth Rock hen she had raised from a chick and named Billina because originally she had thought it would grow up to be a rooster. Billina was now a plump and stately matron; Dorothy picked her up with an effort, smoothing her coppery gold feathers. "Did you lay an egg this morning, Billina?" she asked. Billina fixed her with a beady, noncommittal stare. "Let's go and see," Dorothy murmured, trying to hide her concern and reassure the hen. Billina had not been herself since the tornado, either. Once she had been the best layer on the farm, but she had not laid a single egg in the past six months.

Dorothy carried the hen around the side of the kitchen and glanced in through the gaping wall at the unfinished room beyond it. Her Uncle Henry sat on a chair in the middle of the room, resting his shoulder against an upright post. One leg was propped up on an old sawhorse that was covered with blankets. All around him untouched wood and tools lay in a careless clutter below the naked beams of the half-built wall. The stairway to the nonexistent upstairs jagged skyward above him like an accusing finger.

Uncle Henry finished rolling a cigarette and sealed it with his tongue. He struck a match to light it. Then, slowly and deliberately, he peeled the red star from the tobacco pouch. Turning to face the post behind him, he took a small nail from his shirt pocket and tacked the star to the post with his thumb. It was the latest in a long line of red stars, some of them faded and dog-eared.

"Good morning, Uncle Henry," Dorothy said hesitantly. He glanced up at her, his eyes sharp; but he only nodded slowly in reply. Dorothy

went on to the barn, feeling her spirits fall, knowing that something troubled him, too, but not what or why.

With Billina under her arm, she wandered slowly through the vast, creaking barn, searching for one of the hen's eggs. The empty stalls were lit by dusty shafts of light drifting down through the countless holes in the barn's ravaged roof; but although she searched every stall, she found no egg hidden in the musty straw. "Where is it, Billina?" she asked anxiously.

The hen squirmed in her grasp, kicking out with scaly, clawed feet until Dorothy let her go. Billina ruffled her wings and waddled out of the barn with a determination that gave Dorothy sudden hope as she followed the hen back outside.

Billina led her out into the barnyard again, past the finished side of the house. The doorless entrance leading down to the storm cellar gaped blackly in the foundation wall. It made her think of a great waiting mouth. Dorothy stopped, peering uncertainly down into the darkness. She could not see any bottom to the steps leading down, down into the blackness. She shivered, taking a step backward, feeling as if something watched her; feeling something unseen touch her like the cold breath of winter—a memory, or a premonition.

She shivered and hurried away to search beneath the watering trough, still hoping against hope that she would find an egg. Billina pecked and scratched in the dirt nearby, seeming to have forgotten all about their search. There was no egg beneath the trough. Dorothy sat back on her heels and wiped wisps of hair from her eyes. "Billina," she said, her unhappiness and frustration growing, "if you don't start laying again, Aunt Em said she's going to stew you up for supper!"

Billina clucked warily, studying Dorothy with one bright black eye as she pecked again at something buried in the dirt. She scratched it free with a sturdy claw, then tossed it into the air with her beak. It landed with a small *thud* beside the watering trough. Curious, Dorothy picked it up and found that she was holding a rusted key, covered in dirt. She poked the mud from the center of the thumb-piece, revealing a circle with a diagonal shaft through it. She took a sudden breath, and traced the circle with her finger . . . O . . . and then the diagonal shaft . . . Z! She let her breath out in a whisper, "Oz . . ."

Dorothy looked up at the sky, remembering last night's fallen star. And then she turned and ran back toward the house with the key clutched in her fist. Toto followed her, barking with uncomprehending excitement.

Aunt Em, sitting near the chicken shed and washing eggs, looked up at Dorothy's excited shout, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Look, Aunt Em, look what I found!"

Em took the key from her and held it between her thumb and forefinger experimentally. Then she looked down at Dorothy's flushed, excited face, not knowing why a rusty old key should be such a source of excitement. "This is just the key to the old house before the tornado. I must have turned it a thousand times." She turned it again, absently, in an imaginary lock.

"No! It's from *Oz,* Aunt Em!" Dorothy burst out. Her small fingers poked at the thumbpiece. "Look! It's proof!" She looked up into her aunt's face eagerly and saw the familiar look that came over it at the mere mention of Oz. Suddenly all the excitement drained out of her, and tears instantly filled her eyes. Em kneeled down beside Dorothy and put a comforting arm around her. But there was no belief in her aunt's sympathetic gaze.

"They sent it to me," Dorothy insisted, her small voice faltering. "I think I saw it fall last night . . ." She looked back at the key again.

"Dorothy," Aunt Em said, quietly but firmly, "remember how we spoke?"

Dorothy nodded, not wanting to. "Not to talk about Oz."

"Why?"

Dorothy looked down at Toto, who sat gazing up at her from the step with mute loyalty. He knew all about Oz, just as she did. After all, hadn't they been carried there together by the tornado? If only dogs could speak! Forcing the hateful words out, she said, "Because it's just in my imagination."

Em nodded and sighed deeply as she handed the key back to her. "I know you don't want to go today, but you haven't slept the night through since the tornado, and you're no help to me when you are like this." She had told Dorothy at breakfast that they were going to Cottonwood Falls today to see a doctor, who might be able to help her.

"But Aunt Em," Dorothy protested desperately, "my friends are in trouble, I just know it!" That was why her dreams, which at first had been filled with wonderful memories and longing, had changed and grown so frightening. She was sure of it.

"We're in trouble, Dorothy!" Em said, her patience snapping. "We lost the old house in the cyclone . . . We had to lay off the hired hands . . . The crops aren't half of what we have a right to expect. We never before had to have a mortgage; now we may have to have two." She looked away across the fields, her hands spread helplessly. "Winter's coming on . . . and the new house still isn't finished." Em looked back again along the side of the house to where Henry sat unmoving, his cigarette dangling from his lips. Smoke drifted from his lips, only to be blown away by the wind.

Em pressed her lips together, trying to hold back the words that were forcing their way out. It wasn't like her to feel this way, to feel as if she had lost control of everything, even her own emotions—that was the worst part of it, somehow. The tornado had been God's will, but God helped those who helped themselves. "Henry used to take second place to nobody. Now he just sits and— It's a shame . . . a shame . . . I do mortally wish he would help!" Her hands pressed into her apron pockets, and made fists.

Dorothy stared up at her aunt, her wide blue eyes still too full of tears and her heart too full of feelings she barely understood. "He broke his leg, Aunt Em," she said.

"That leg's mended now, Dorothy," her aunt replied almost angrily. "Mended, but a person would never know. You'd think life was over . . ." She shook her head. "Come on now. Get yourself ready or we'll be late." She picked up the box of eggs and walked off toward the house.

Dorothy went into her room, moving as if her feet were made of lead. With a heavy heart, she changed into her best dress, the red-and-white striped one that Aunt Em had hand-smocked for her last winter. It was her favorite; it made her feel safe and reminded her of happier times. Brushing her hair, she then plaited it again into long, neat braids. No matter what this doctor said, she would never forget Oz. They would see him, and then they would come home again, and the dreadful visit would be over. She tried to smile at Toto as she put on her coat and hat. Then, stepping past him, she started down the hall. He followed her, wriggling with excitement as he saw her in her Sunday clothes. No doubt he thought they were going on a trip to town together.

But as she reached the screen door, she pushed him back inside. "No, Toto," she said, suddenly feeling very much alone again as she shut the door and heard his disappointed whines. But Aunt Em had already told her Cottonwood Falls was much too long a trip for him.

Aunt Em was already waiting in the yard with their one horse hitched to the dusty, ancient buggy. For their trip to the big city she had put on her best dress too, with her one good coat and hat. As soon as Dorothy climbed up beside her, Em clucked to the mare and slapped the reins, whereupon the buggy jolted out of the yard toward the dirt road that led to town.

Looking back over her shoulder, Dorothy managed a little wave to her uncle, who was still sitting there in the half-finished room. He waved back, and she smiled. "Get yourselves back before sundown!" he called.

Suddenly something caught Dorothy's eye, and she felt a sudden twinge of dismay as she saw Toto squeezing out through the half-open

kitchen window. The little dog leaped awkwardly to the ground and started after the buggy as fast as his stubby legs would carry him, all the while yapping frantically. He slowed down only to squeeze under the barnyard gates and then came racing after them down the road.

“Go home, Toto! Go home! Toto, go home!” Dorothy cried, but he paid no attention. “Oh, Aunt Em,” Dorothy wailed as she turned to her aunt with a stricken face. Toto was still following them. The older woman went on driving, her own eyes fixed on the road, her thoughts far ahead already. Dorothy twisted in the hard seat to shout again, “Go home, Toto! Go home!”

Finally, as they passed a small, neat house, Toto slowed. He sat down in the road at last, panting with exhaustion. As the buggy did not stop, but continued on without him, he lifted his muzzle and howled. He howled and howled.

Dorothy clung to the seat back, watching his small solitary shape grow smaller as his howling grew fainter. “Will he be all right?” she asked, as she finally lost sight of him.

“He will,” Aunt Em said reassuringly.

Dorothy looked ahead again at the endless track of the road, wondering what the rest of the day held in store.

CHAPTER 3

Em drove on down the rutted, dusty track, lost in her own thoughts, as Dorothy settled resignedly into the seat beside her. The empty plains, the sere autumn fields, seemed to stretch away forever beneath the glaring blue of the endless sky. It was easy to forget there was anywhere else, anywhere different, when this was all a body ever saw, day after day . . .

Before long they passed the small, neat clapboard church where she and her family attended services every Sunday in good weather. As they passed its open door Em said a silent prayer that she was doing the right thing by taking Dorothy for "electric healing." The very idea sounded new and modern—and frightening. But this was 1899, after all. So far faith and love and common sense hadn't worked to make Dorothy forget her strange dream about Oz; Em hoped that newfangled technology would work better. Everyone talked as if an age of miracles was coming. A few more months and it would be the twentieth century. A new millennium . . . a better world.

As the road dipped down into the muddy creek bottom, Em saw the familiar sign, FRANKLIN, *pop. 17.* Beside the sign a homeless family was camping at the creekside—all their worldly goods piled in one wagon, their only roof the sky, their only hearth a campfire. The man sat dispiritedly on a stool next to the wagon, while children played and shouted aimlessly around him. His wife hung the clothes that she had scrubbed in the creek from a line tied between wagon and pole. As they passed, she looked up for a second. Then, stretching her stiff, aching back, she wiped strands of hair from her face with a weary hand.

Em looked away quickly, urging the horse on up the other bank of the stream. There were folks worse off than she was . . . but suddenly she felt herself too close to being in that unfortunate woman's shoes.

They drove on into town, past the four buildings that were Franklin. The street was empty but for a single man, climbing down out of his saddle in front of the general store. After tying his horse to a rail, he went inside. A carved jack-o'-lantern grinned vacantly at them from the store window as they drove by. Once they were on the far side of town, the empty prairie opened out ahead of them again.

"I've never been . . . past Franklin," Dorothy said in a small voice. She tugged on a braid.

Except to Oz, Dorothy thought, but didn't say it aloud, and Em tried

to feel heartened. The way to Oz was not marked on any map she had ever seen. It was a magical place, Dorothy had told her, and you could only get there by wishing. Perhaps that was what was wrong with the child—she needed to see more of the real world than just their farm. Em could understand that. Perhaps this trip to another town would do them both some good.

Fallow fields, plowed under for the winter, were all that she could see ahead, all the way to the horizon. Behind them, to the west, great purple thunderheads were massing, smudging the perfect blue dome of the sky. She hoped the storm would not catch up with them before they got back home.

It was shortly past noon, from the angle of the sun, when they reached Cottonwood Falls at last, POPULATION: *12617,* the sign said. Just the thought of so many people made her giddy. The road began to run down the side of the river bluff, letting them see the splendid sight spread out below—homes, stores, buildings she couldn't even guess the uses of, all gathered into one great tapestry along the bank of the wide, peaceful river. It had been years since she had been to Cottonwood Falls herself—more years than she liked to remember. Dorothy sat wide-eyed but silent beside her as they drove into the city.

After so many years, Em could barely recall the arrangement of the streets in Cottonwood Falls. But with a few directions from friendly passersby, she was able to locate the doctor's office on a quiet sidestreet lined with leafless elms.

Em pulled the buggy to a stop; the heavy wooden brake screeched loudly as she set it against the steel-bound wheel. She sat with Dorothy for a long moment just gazing in wonder at the big house. Surely the man who lived in such a mansion must be a good doctor.

At last they climbed down from the buggy's seat, brushing at their skirts and stretching their legs. Em caught up the lunch pail she had packed for her niece; then, taking Dorothy's hand firmly in her own, she led her up the steps to the front door and looked about for a knocker, but found none. Instead she saw a plain white button beside the door—surely one of those newfangled electric doorbells. She pressed it once, uncertainly; after a moment she pressed it again, not sure whether to believe the gizmo would really function. But after another moment she could hear steps coming down the hall, and then the great wooden door opened.

A middle-aged woman in a severe, old-fashioned dress stood there, studying them for a long moment without speaking. Her posture was stately and imposing, and she was dressed entirely in black. A single cameo, with a tiny, exquisite face carved on it, was pinned to her high

collar; that was all the color or adornment she had allowed herself. The woman might have been attractive, except that her long, dour face looked as if it had never worn a smile or been young.

Without introducing herself, the woman gestured for them to come inside, then led them through the foyer into a large front room. Potted palms sat before the high windows, their graceful, arching fronds glowing spring green in the light. Long, elegantly draped curtains and ornately framed mirrors set off the rich wood paneling of the walls. Dorothy stared in fascination at an impressive deer's head that was hung above the mantel. Its glass eyes stared back at her in silent resignation. Voices reached them dimly from another part of the house.

"Please wait here," the woman said. She disappeared into the hallway, the long train of her black gown hissing behind her.

They waited, not speaking or even sitting down, for what seemed to Dorothy like an endless time. At last the woman returned, unexpectedly stepping through a doorway beneath the staircase in the hall. Climbing up the last step from the dark cellar, she held the door open and stood aside as the doctor himself climbed into view. He was a tall, handsome man with a full beard and an air of confidence about him. Em felt a little of her own confidence return as he smiled ingratiatingly and offered his hand.

"Good afternoon, madam. And you must be Dottie," he said, looking down at her niece.

"Dorothy," Em corrected, knowing how Dorothy hated that nickname.

"Ah, yes, Dorothy . . . of course!" the doctor said, a bit too heartily.

Dorothy frowned, disliking him immediately—a feeling she couldn't really explain even to herself. Something about him seemed—not right, somehow. She looked away at the paneled door and at the steps leading down to the basement, like the steps to a bottomless storm cellar. The nurse, noticing her stare, stepped into the hall and closed the door. The doctor struck a match and relit the pipe he held in his other hand, smiling reassuringly at Em as he winked at Dorothy.

"This is Head Nurse Wilson," he said, "and I'm Dr. Worley." He gestured down the hall toward his office with the stem of his pipe. "Let's sit down and you can tell me why you've come all this way, and what I can do to make you happy."

CHAPTER 4

Dorothy sat quietly in the doctor's office, telling him everything that she had tried to tell her aunt and uncle. As the words came spilling out after so long, a feeling of great relief filled her. Maybe this time someone would believe her. But even if Dr. Worley didn't believe her either, at least she was able to tell the story again. She had been forbidden even to mention it at home. ". . . he had a tin leg made . . . but then a witch enchanted his axe and he kept cutting off all his other parts until there was nothing left . . ."

Dr. Worley sat behind his desk, listening attentively, turning the key that Billina had found over and over in his hands. At last he glanced at her aunt, and Dorothy recognized the look in his eyes all too well. Aunt Em returned his look with a troubled frown.

". . . until he was all made of tin," Dorothy went on, her hope failing. "Even the . . ."

"That's all right, Dorothy," the doctor interrupted gently. "You mentioned something about a tiger . . . ?" He leaned forward, scratching more notes on a sheet of paper with his pen. Dorothy stared at the large ruby ring he wore.

"A lion," she said stubbornly. "The Cowardly Lion."

Dr. Worley glanced up. "He could talk too, like the scarecrow and the tin man?"

She nodded. "Yes, he . . ."

The doctor looked down at his notes again before she could finish. "How did you get back from . . . Oz . . . ?"

Dorothy felt a slight prickle of surprise at something in his voice as he spoke that special name and asked her that question. "With my Ruby Slippers."

He nodded slightly, still scribbling notes. "Exactly . . . how did they work?" He actually seemed interested now.

"You put them on and clicked their heels three times and said: 'There's no place like home—' " Dorothy closed her eyes, vividly remembering that moment.

"Dorothy, where are those slippers now?" the doctor asked, as if the answer she gave would be the answer to some great and important mystery—or the answer to some test she would pass or fail.

Dorothy slipped down into the seat of her large wooden chair. "I lost them . . ." she said, her voice growing tiny. "They fell off . . . on

the way back." She didn't say anything more, knowing from the way they both looked at her that it would be useless to go on. Then she heard a clock ticking somewhere; the sound was very loud in the sudden silence that fell between them.

Dr. Worley cleared his throat expectantly, but Dorothy still said nothing. Her mouth settled into a tight, stubborn line, as she withdrew further into the chair, and into herself. He was laughing at her behind his eyes, mocking her with his kindly smile; as if he knew some secret about her that even she did not know. She didn't like being made to feel foolish. Even Aunt Em was shifting uncomfortably in her chair.

Dr. Worley rose to his feet suddenly, moving out from behind his desk. "Well . . . I know just the thing to cheer Dorothy up!" he said loudly as he came toward her and handed her back her key. She took it and pushed it deep into the pocket of her dress, knotting her fingers tightly around it. Suddenly she felt not just resentful, but frightened of this man who she somehow knew was not at all what he seemed. He crossed the room to a large closet and opened the door.

Behind the door sat a tall, gleaming box with a window of bevelled glass at its top. Dorothy could see strange mechanical works behind the glass. She had never seen anything quite like it, but it reminded her of Aunt Em's grandfather clock. It sat on wheels, and Dr. Worley pushed it slowly out into the room.

"Dorothy," he said, smiling in a way that she didn't find at all reassuring, although he plainly expected her to, "this electrical marvel will make it possible for you to sleep again. It will also take away those bad waking dreams you have been telling me about." He turned to the machine, patting it as if it were an old friend. "This fellow here has a face. See it?" He pointed to two round meters behind the glass window. "Here are his eyes." Then he put his hand over the rheostat. *"This* must be his nose . . ." Touching the machine's electrical voltage controller, he said, "and this must be his mouth." Dorothy watched with growing dread as he made her recognize each feature of the machine's startled face. Was this horrible creature that wasn't even alive really going to make her forget all about Oz? She looked over at her aunt, who smiled encouragement. Then Dorothy looked back at the machine again. "But what's this, Dorothy?" the doctor asked, as he touched the tip of the controller's sliding lever, raising his eyebrows expectantly.

Dorothy didn't answer, refusing to help him complete the awful picture. She stared at the frightening mechanical face, wanting to close her eyes, but somehow not being able to.

"Don't you know?" Dr. Worley asked, with mock surprise. He laughed and glanced again at her aunt. "Why, it's his tongue, isn't it?"

“Will it hurt?” Dorothy whispered, barely able to force the words out.

Dr. Worley shook his head. “No no no,” he said, raising his hands. “Not at all, my dear. It just manages electrical current. Your aunt already knows that we’re at the dawn of a new age. In two months it will be the year nineteen hundred. A new century! The twentieth century! A century of . . . *electricity!”* He turned on a table lamp with a flourish and focused his charm on Aunt Em. It had been so long since Uncle Henry had spoken more than a few words to her that she felt quite flattered to be talked to about such grand ideas by this handsome doctor.

Dorothy stopped listening as the doctor went on lecturing to her aunt with incomprehensible enthusiasm. Instead, she studied the machine’s wide-eyed, staring face, feeling as if it were somehow as amazed to find her here, staring back at it, as she was.

“. . . and wouldn’t you know, madam, we’ve found out that the brain itself is an electrical machine. Nothing but a machine . . . and like any machine, sometimes the brain malfunctions . . .”

Dorothy looked away from the machine-man, her eyes wandering the room. A sudden tiny flicker of movement drew her gaze to the large mirror framed in golden stained glass that hung on the wall across the room. There, in the corner of the mirror, was the reflection of a little blond girl dressed in a white, formless shift. Dorothy turned in her seat, looking over her shoulder, to see the girl peering in at the doorway.

“When it malfunctions—a blow to the head, for example—the brain produces useless excess currents. And these excess currents are our dreams and delusions.” Dr. Worley raised his voice abruptly as he noticed Dorothy’s attention wandering. “Just like the dreams that you have, Dorothy.”

Dorothy looked back at him, reluctantly but obediently.

He pointed at the machine with a flourish. “Now we have the means to control these excess currents.” He cocked his head at her.

“Oh, yes,” she answered, because she realized an answer was expected, but she had no idea what he was talking about and wondered if he did either. Aunt Em gazed at him with respectful awe.

“Fine,” the doctor said, nodding his approval.

Dorothy glanced toward the doorway, but the other girl was gone.

Then, Dr. Worley began to speak to her aunt again, and after a moment Dorothy looked back, her heart squeezed with panic, as his words suddenly registered in her mind.

“. . . that the treatment for such a serious problem can’t possibly be

done in one afternoon. We must keep her here overnight, at least."

"Oh," Aunt Em said, her face filling with dismay.

Dorothy clenched her fists, willing her aunt to tell him *that it was impossible, they couldn't possibly stay for that long, Uncle Henry*— "Well . . ." Aunt Em murmured uncertainly, "if you think it's best . . . I want what's best for her." She looked at Dr. Worley, not meeting Dorothy's desperate stare at all.

Dorothy opened her mouth to cry out in protest, but nothing at all came out. Numb with betrayal, she stood up and let herself be led back down the hallway by the doctor and Nurse Wilson, as they showed her aunt to the door.

Nurse Wilson held Dorothy's hand in a firm grasp, as if she were afraid Dorothy would try to bolt out the open front door. Aunt Em kneeled down, giving her niece a warm smile. But the smile faltered slightly as she looked into Dorothy's frightened eyes, and she could not completely hide the guilty apprehension in her own. "I must get back to Hen before nightfall. You understand, don't you?" She glanced down, realizing as she raised her arms for a hug that she was still carrying Dorothy's lunch pail. She held it out. "Here's your lunch. I was thinking you'd only stay a short time." Her eyes remained glued to the pail as she spoke.

Dorothy took it from her hand and clung to it; its familiar form was like a promise or a lucky charm, a comforting piece of home. She had decided to be good, and to do as her aunt wished. There were many things about the grown-up world that she didn't understand, and this was one of them. Dorothy realized there had been troubles between Em and Henry about the house, but Em was also unhappy about Dorothy's belief in the Land of Oz. Maybe it would be better for everyone if she did just forget about it. Maybe it *was* all just a bump on her head. She loved Aunt Em, and Aunt Em seemed to like and trust this doctor—she wouldn't leave her here if she didn't—so she would try, even if doing so were difficult.

"That's not necessary," Nurse Wilson said brusquely. "We have excellent meals here."

Suddenly self-conscious, Aunt Em said, "You must be a good girl and do what the doctor and head nurse tell you, and I'll see you tomorrow and we'll go home." Her words almost ran over one another, in her rush to reassure her niece and herself. She looked up at the head nurse. "I've never left her out of my sight among strangers." Her jaw tightened slightly.

"She's in good hands. Don't worry," Dr. Worley said, smiling.

Dorothy clutched her lunch pail with white knuckles. "Will you bring Toto with you when you come to get me?"

Her aunt nodded. “I will. I will do that.” She leaned forward and kissed Dorothy, hugging her tightly inside warm, familiar arms. Then she rose and turned away, walking quickly to the front door, which she opened and closed after her. Then she was gone.

The head nurse took Dorothy upstairs and down a long hallway, still holding her hand too tightly. A male attendant wearing a white hospital gown over his high-collared shirt came toward them, pushing a gurney with wheels that squealed horribly as they rolled. Dorothy and Nurse Wilson moved aside as it passed, and Nurse Wilson suddenly jerked the lunch pail from Dorothy’s hand, dropping it on the passing cart. “You won’t need that.”

Dorothy looked after the cart helplessly, as the head nurse led her on down the hall. The upstairs was much less elegant than the downstairs; here the wallpaper was faded, and the hallways were dark and musty. At last they came to the doorway of a small bedroom, and Nurse Wilson guided her inside. The bleak, tiny room had nothing in it but the bed, a dresser, and a straight-backed chair. The dresser had once had a mirror attached to it, but it had been taken away, or broken, and all that could be seen now were the faded newspapers that had been used as backing for it.

“You stay here until we come and get you,” Nurse Wilson told her. “You may take a nap if you wish.” She left the room, closing the door.

Dorothy looked at the bed resignedly, but the last thing she felt like doing right now was taking a nap. The only window, high up on the far side of the room, was covered by a heavy screen. It was like looking out of a chicken coop. All she could see beyond the screen were the top branches of the bare elm tree outside, and a patch of darkening sky.

Dorothy crossed the room to the bed, which lay beneath the window, and climbed up on it to peer out. Beyond the elm, far down the brick-paved drive, she could see her aunt driving away in the buggy, going home beneath a sky gray with clouds. “Aunt Em . . .” Dorothy whispered, fighting back sudden tears.

All at once, reflected in the windowpane beside her like a ghost, she saw the reflection of the blond girl once again. Dorothy turned and found the girl standing just inside her closed door. She had never even heard the door open. The girl smiled shyly, holding out a small, carved pumpkin, which she then set carefully on the dresser. “This is for you.”

Her voice was soft and friendly; however mysteriously she had come into the room, Dorothy was glad for the company and curious about what another girl like herself was doing at Dr. Worley’s.

“Thank you,” Dorothy said, climbing down from the bed.

“It’s Hallowe’en soon.” The other girl seemed to be groping for things to say.

“I know,” Dorothy answered, feeling the same self-conscious awkwardness, wanting to say just the right words, the ones that would make two strangers become friends.

The blond girl asked suddenly, “Why are you here, Dorothy?”

Dorothy glanced down and noticed the girl was barefoot. “Because I can’t sleep and I talk about a place I once went to that nobody believes in,” she answered, a little sullenly.

The blond girl stared at her for a long moment, looking as if she wanted desperately to say something, but couldn’t.

Dorothy was about to ask her the same question, when suddenly she heard a distant, muffled scream. It seemed to have come from below—from the sinister basement beneath the stairs? Dorothy now opened her mouth to ask a different question.

A flash of lightning lit the darkening room, making her turn, startled, to look out the window. The soft, distant crack and rumble of thunder filled her ears. She turned back—but the girl had disappeared.

Dorothy crossed swiftly over to the door of her room and opened it. There was no sign of the girl. Instead, down at the far end of the hall, Dorothy saw the dark silhouette of Nurse Wilson just disappearing around the corner, and the sound of her black taffeta dress hissing on the bare wood lingered a few moments after she had gone. Dorothy quickly closed the door and shut herself up in her little room to wait.

CHAPTER 5

Dorothy's room slowly darkened. After a time she got up from the hard chair and moved to the softer bed to sit, still waiting. She had hoped at first that the blond girl would come back, but there was no sign of her—or of anyone else. The house was very quiet. She had not heard any more screams, either . . .

A light tapping sound behind her made her turn suddenly to look up at the window. Fat raindrops were spattering on the pane. She glanced back again at the pumpkin on her dresser. Its jolly, unchanging smile did make her feel a little less lonely. She stood up and went to the door, where a circular switch was set in the wall beside the frame. She had never seen an electric switch before, though her uncle had told her about them.

Curious, she rotated the knob. There was a sudden *snap* and the room filled with light. A single electric bulb hanging from a wire in the middle of the ceiling threw stark-edged shadows into the corners of the room—shadows that were stronger than those cast by the kerosene lamps at home. She twisted the knob again, and the light went out. She turned it back on again, fascinated.

The window was a blur of rain patterns now, and a gust of wind sent a draft whining in around its edges, making the light bulb swing gently on its wires. The shadows in the room swayed eerily in rhythm with the bulb, like water lapping over the furniture and walls.

The silence was broken suddenly by the distant squealing of gurney wheels. Watching the shadows flow over the walls, Dorothy seemed to glimpse strange faces hiding in the cracks of the dingy plaster, forming and disappearing again.

The squealing sound grew closer, and closer, and then Dorothy could hear that it was accompanied by the hissing sound of Nurse Wilson's dress. Dorothy sat still on the bed, waiting. She had seen rabbits as still as herself when they had been brushed by the swooping shadow of a hawk.

The sound stopped outside her door. A moment passed in which Dorothy counted her heartbeats, and then the door opened. Nurse Wilson stood there; two male attendants were waiting behind her in the hallway with one of the gurneys. "Would you like to go for a ride, Dorothy?" she asked.

Dorothy hesitated a moment and then, not knowing what else to do, she stood and stepped forward into the hall. One of the attendants

lifted her up onto the gurney.

“Lie down,” the head nurse instructed.

“I’d like to sit up, if I may?” Dorothy asked, as politely as she knew how.

Head Nurse Wilson frowned. “What did your aunt say?”

“To do what you told me, Miss Wilson,” Dorothy said in a small voice.

“Then lie down.”

Dorothy obeyed and felt herself quiver as the two attendants covered her with a blanket. They strapped down her wrists and ankles and buckled a heavy, studded belt across her middle.

“Why do you have to tie me down?” Dorothy protested.

“So you won’t fall off,” Nurse Wilson replied flatly.

Dorothy looked at her with quiet defiance. “I came here all the way from the farm on a buggy, and I didn’t fall off.”

The head nurse ignored her. She gestured at the attendants, and they began to push the gurney down the hall. The wheels screeched shrilly.

“Did I hear someone scream earlier?” Dorothy asked.

“No,” Nurse Wilson snapped.

Dorothy, facing backward and unable to see where she was being taken, studied the stiff and expressionless faces of Nurse Wilson and the attendant pushing the gurney. The string of hallway lights passed above one after the other, casting strange shadows over their features and making dark hollows of their eyes. The deep and muffled thud of distant thunder joined the high-pitched squealing of the wheels and the hissing taffeta. Suddenly she was pushed through two doors and into a large circular room. She caught a glimpse of Dr. Worley’s electrical machine waiting against the wall as the attendants wheeled her gurney into position.

She heard another, muted crack of thunder. Suddenly Dr. Worley was standing above her, peering down at her with his cryptic smile.

“Hello, Dorothy. How are you?”

“I wish I wasn’t tied down,” Dorothy said frankly.

The doctor patted her shoulder. “Nothing to worry about.” He began to untangle the wires which ran from the electrical machine to a set of strange-looking earmuffs.

“What are those?” Dorothy asked, both curious and frightened.

Dr. Worley held them up. “When you’re ready, we’ll put these over your ears and pretty soon they’ll draw all of those unpleasant dreams out of your head. Then when you wake up you’ll never be bothered by

them again.” He stepped back, out of her view.

Dorothy rolled her head to the side, until she could see the whole room reflected in a glass cabinet-front. She watched the doctor winding up his machine: *tccccck! tccccck! tccccck!* It reminded her even more of an immense clock.

Dorothy gasped as a flash of real lightning from the world outside washed the room in an eerie glare. The lights dimmed, then came back on. A deep peal of thunder rolled and crashed around the house. From somewhere in the basement she heard a terrible wail, that fell away into pitiful moaning. Dorothy felt goose bumps rise on her arms at the sound.

The doctor turned away from his machine, his smile gone. “Would you see to that, please?” he said sharply. Dorothy could see two shadows slide along the wall as the attendants left the room.

The doctor passed the earmuffs to Nurse Wilson and completed a few adjustments to the machine which made it buzz softly. Two electric bulbs on the machine lit up and cast a vivid yellow light over Dr. Worley’s features. He hit another switch, and sudden stinging sparks of electricity danced on the rim of the earmuffs. Nurse Wilson did not flinch, but smiled at Dorothy for the first time. Her smile frightened Dorothy even more than her frown.

Nurse Wilson appeared over her with the earmuffs, placed them carefully over Dorothy’s ears and then stepped back. She felt the metal cold against her skin.

Cranking the voltage handle on the machine, the doctor made a final adjustment to the strength of the current. The two light blubs began to pulsate, slowly at first, and then more rapidly.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Yes, Doctor,” Nurse Wilson answered.

Dorothy bit her lip as the doctor reached for the switch.

A blinding flash of lightning lit up the room like a flare; an ear-splitting crash of thunder shook the house to its foundations.

Blackness and silence followed. After a moment, Dorothy’s deafened ears began to clear, and she heard the hard, insistent drumming of the rain. Somewhere in the darkened house, someone began to wail again. Dorothy began to tremble inside the restraining straps, terrified and confused.

“Oh, dear,” Worley’s voice murmured, somewhere nearby.

“I’ll see to that,” Nurse Wilson said. “You check the generator, Doctor.”

Dorothy heard their footsteps fade as the two of them left her alone in the darkness. Outside, the wind howled like a chorus of demons

around the corner of the house. Then Dorothy heard another sound and knew that someone else had entered the room. Suddenly the earmuffs were pulled from her head.

"Who's there?" Dorothy gasped.

"Shhh!" a voice warned. Another flash of lightning filled the room with a moment's illumination, and Dorothy saw the girl who had given her the pumpkin standing beside her, unfastening the straps that held her prisoner.

"Quick!" the girl whispered. "We have to get you out of here."

Someone screamed again, somewhere in the darkness. The screams faded into moaning once more as Dorothy slid down from the gurney. "What's that sound?" she asked, a little shrilly.

The other girl tugged at her hand. "There are patients here who've been damaged, locked in the cellar. Quick!"

Dorothy followed her out of the room. They ran together down the lightning-lit hallway. The girl led Dorothy with instinctive sureness, until another flash of lightning showed them the front door ahead—and the silhouette of someone else rising into the hall from beneath the stairs. The figure froze at the sound of their footsteps. Dorothy's friend pulled her into an open closet full of hospital gowns, and they crouched together there, holding their breath. Darkness fell abruptly around them again.

And then, just as suddenly, the house lights came on. The girls peered cautiously out from among the gowns to find Head Nurse Wilson standing at the top of the cellar stairs, holding a light in her hand. Her face mirrored their own surprise.

The blond girl caught Dorothy's hand again. "Run, Dorothy, run!" she cried, pulling her back along the hall toward the rear of the house. Together they ran out through the back door, the screen slamming shut behind them. The pouring rain drenched them to the skin as they dashed across the backyard, each clinging to the other's hand as tightly as if they were joined into one. Behind them in the house someone rang an alarm bell. Dorothy glanced back over her shoulder and gasped as she saw the dark figures of Dr. Worley's attendants running after them through the trees.

"Faster, Dorothy!" the other girl shouted.

A branch slapped Dorothy's face unexpectedly as she looked ahead again into the darkness. The ground was sloping downward now beneath her feet, giving her more momentum. She dodged heedlessly through the underbrush, her face and hands stinging. Behind them she could hear crashing footsteps closing in, and the sound of heavy, regular breathing. She looked back again, unable to stop herself, and saw Nurse Wilson just behind her, gaining; the head nurse's face was a

bulging-eyed mask of rage and effort. “Stop!” Nurse Wilson bellowed.

Suddenly the ground seemed to drop out from under Dorothy’s feet, and with a scream she half-plunged, half-fell down the steep, mud-slick side of an embankment. Crashing through the sumac bushes at the bottom of the slope, she found herself sprawled on the black shore of the surging, flood-swollen river.

Beside her, Dorothy’s nameless friend tried to pull herself to her feet; she cried out as her feet slipped out from under her again and she tumbled into the river. *“Dorothy . . .”* she screamed.

Dorothy struggled to her knees, reaching out, then lost her own balance and fell into the water. She grabbed a bush, clinging desperately to its spiny branches, just as the head nurse crashed down the slope behind her. As Nurse Wilson’s long arms reached out for Dorothy, from the swirling waters below the blond girl cried, “Jump!”

Dorothy glanced up and saw Nurse Wilson’s face. Without a second thought she let go and sank into the water. The surging current swept the two girls away from the shore, gathered in its fluid arms. Another flash of lightning showed them Nurse Wilson sprawled at the river’s edge, clinging frantically to a pokeberry bush—half her body in the black torrent, and half on the shore. Her skirt streamed about her flailing legs like a malignant black lily, and she screamed in frustration as she watched them borne away. A crash of thunder drowned out her shrieks, as she disappeared into the darkness.

Free of Nurse Wilson at last, Dorothy put all her efforts into staying afloat. She choked and struggled, fighting the wild current, unable even to see the shore in the darkness. She sank and floundered back to the surface again, coughing, searching around her in the water for her new friend.

“Here, Dorothy! Here!”

She heard the other girl’s cry, saw her all at once nearby, clinging to the slats of a chicken coop that had been caught in the flood.

“Here!” the girl shouted again. Reaching out, she grasped Dorothy’s flailing hand and pulled her toward the coop. Dorothy caught hold of the splintery wood with frantic gratitude and drew herself to it. But as she added her weight to the wood, the flimsy coop began to sink. “It won’t hold us both,” the other girl cried in dismay, as the coop sank unexpectedly, ducking them both beneath the cold water.

The coop erupted to the surface again. Dorothy gasped for breath, shaking water from her eyes and ears. “Hold onto it!” she heard her friend shout, somewhere in the darkness. *“Hold on!”* But the other girl’s voice seemed dim and far away. Dorothy peered around her. Trees on the distant shore seemed to blaze up as if they were on fire and fade again, as lightning illuminated the night. But the other girl

no longer clung to the coop beside her, and she was nowhere to be seen in the raging floodwaters nearby. Dorothy was all alone. She tried to call out, but realized she didn't even know her lost friend's name.

Dorothy drifted on through the night, clinging to the chicken coop with all her strength. Tears trickled down her cheeks as she thought of the other girl; after a time they stopped, as she grew too cold and numb for sorrow or even fright. She had no idea where she was, or where she was bound. It seemed as if she had been drifting forever. But slowly the drenching rain lessened then finally stopped. The sky and the night around her no longer seemed to be one impenetrable blackness. Stars began to peep out one by one from between the ragged curtains of the clouds.

Dorothy coughed up more water and caught her breath. Then, gathering her strength, she pulled herself up and broke away several of the slats on the side of the coop and pulled herself in through the gap. The coop was just sturdy enough to support her weight like a raft.

Looking up, she saw more stars appearing; lightning and thunder no longer tore apart the night. But without benefit of the lightning, she could no longer see the shores of the river. Before long Dorothy realized that the motion beneath her feet had changed from a surging rush to a choppy up-and-down rocking. As she lay staring up at the sky, the full moon slipped from its hiding place behind the clouds. A long, bright road of light spread across the water, leading from where she stood on the raft almost to the moon's smiling face. The path looked so real that she could almost believe that if she stepped out onto it she could follow it to the shore, as she had once followed the Yellow Brick Road of Oz to the Emerald City.

But as she searched around her again in the luminous moonlight, she realized that there was no land anywhere in sight, no matter where she looked. The coop was surely adrift in the middle of the sea.

Dorothy sat down again, feeling dizzy with amazement. Was there a sea in Kansas? She had never heard of one. How far away was she? She began to shiver, cold and frightened, wondering how she would ever find her way home. But then she remembered that she had faced far more terrifying things in Oz than an ocean, no matter how wide it was. Quickly, she shoved her hand into the pocket of her dress, feeling for the key from Oz. It was still there. She smiled, then she sat down again and curled up in a corner of the coop as comfortably as she could. Still very cold and wet, she was no longer afraid. The coop rocked as gently as a cradle on the surface of the strange sea, and after a time she drifted into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER 6

"Kut-kut-kut, ka-daw-kutt! Kut-kut-kut, ka-daw-kutt!"

Dorothy woke in confusion, opening her eyes to empty sky and water—and to the familiar sound of a chicken clucking. She stared around her at the surface of the sea, which was now glassy-calm beneath the warm sun of a new day. Water no longer surged through the slats beside her to soak the floor of the raft. She shook the cotton haze of sleep from her thoughts. Yes, she was still in a chicken coop—but she couldn't have heard a chicken, not in the middle of the ocean.

"Kut-kut-kut, ka-daw-kutt!"

Dorothy sat up straight. "What's that?" she cried, startled into speaking aloud.

"I was just trying to lay my egg, that's all," a scratchy, high-pitched voice replied, quite distinctly. It was just the sort of voice she would have expected a chicken to have, if chickens could speak.

Dorothy leaned forward, looking toward the sound. In the far corner of the coop, among the slatted shadows, sat a plump yellow hen. But it was not just any yellow hen—she would recognize this hen even in the middle of the ocean. "Billina!" she exclaimed in disbelief.

"Who else?" The hen ruffled her feathers nonchalantly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for the two of them to meet like this.

"What are you doing here?" Dorothy burst out, suddenly filled with relief and joy. "Have you been here all night, too?"

Billina flapped her wings and yawned. "I've never been so wet in my whole life," she muttered irritably, ignoring the questions in favor of her own discomfort. "How big is this pond, anyway?" She peered out through the slats, craning her neck.

Dorothy had never been so wet before herself; but at least she would have answered the questions if Billina had asked them of her. Now she understood what Aunt Em meant by *"mad as a wet hen."* "I don't think it's a pond, Billina . . ." she said unhappily. She stood up and looked out over the water. Her eyes widened.

Last night's limitless ocean had drained away while she slept, until all that was left of it was the small, shallow pond in which the coop now floated peacefully. On three sides the shoreline was a vast stretch of desert sand. On the fourth side a grassy knoll pushed up among a beach of rocks and boulders. Beyond it Dorothy could just make out

the edge of a forest. “Well, I guess it *is* a pond,” she said, putting her hands on her hips. “What happened to all the water?” Even as she watched, the pond was getting smaller, shrinking before her eyes.

“Some place for a chicken coop,” Billina grumped.

Dorothy turned back to her. “Where did you learn to talk, anyway? I thought hens could only cluck and cackle . . .”

“Strange, isn’t it?” Billina cocked her head. “How’s my grammar?”

Dorothy considered what she had heard. “Very good, for a beginner.” She glanced back over the side, watching the pond shrink further, like a bathtub draining. “If we were in the Land of Oz, your talking wouldn’t be strange at all. But out here we must be a long way from Oz.”

Billina fluttered up to the railing of the coop and looked down. “There it goes . . .” The last of the water disappeared into the sand. The coop rested high and dry on solid ground.

“Oz . . .” Dorothy whispered, as her own words suddenly struck her. She put her hand into her pocket, feeling for the key. “Maybe this *is* Oz!” Had her friends found a way to bring her back after all? They had sent her a sign . . . and Billina had found it. Perhaps they needed Billina too.

“Oz?” Billina sounded perplexed.

“It’s a land I went to with Toto when the tornado blew us there in the old house.”

“Well, wherever it is,” said Billina, spreading her wings to jump down, “I think I’ll have a look around and see if I can find myself some breakfast.”

“Wait!” Dorothy grabbed her just in time. “If we are in Oz . . . then this is the Deadly Desert.” She clambered up onto the railing of the coop, and looked over the side at the seemingly normal sand on which it rested. A few large rocks were lying on the surface of the sand, which seemed to have tumbled out from the rocky slope a few yards away. If she could use them as stepping-stones . . .

“Deadly Desert—?” Billina snapped, as if she were still waiting for an explanation.

“It surrounds Oz,” Dorothy said. “If you touch the sand, you turn to dust. Last time I had to fly over it.” She remembered looking down at the endless expanse of softly shifting dunes as the ruby slippers swept her home to Kansas.

The yellow hen rolled her eyes, plainly skeptical. Dorothy frowned in irritation. Billina ought to believe her, at least—but then, Billina had never been anywhere except Kansas, either. She noticed that the hen did not flutter down to the sand, in any case.

Dorothy scooped Billina up in her arms and jumped down onto the nearest rock. She hopped to another, and then another—almost missing her step. She gasped, twisting her body until she caught her balance, and leaped to the next stone. She almost missed her step twice more before she reached the desert's edge; but the thought of being swallowed up, dust to dust—as the Preacher always warned on Sunday—kept her balancing like an acrobat until she reached the shore.

She set Billina down among the rocks and grass on the sunny hillside with a sigh of relief. "There!" she said, satisfied. "Now, let's go over to those trees and see if we can find some fruit or nuts or something for breakfast." She realized she had not had anything to eat for an entire day and night. She might not be ready to eat grubs like a chicken, but she was at least as hungry as Billina was. She began to climb the hill. "After we've had a bit to eat, we'll go on to the Emerald City and see the Scarecrow."

"Scarecrow?" Billina asked, bobbing along through the grass at Dorothy's side. Her tone of voice was exactly what Aunt Em's would have been, at the thought of socializing with a scarecrow.

"He's the King of Oz, Billina!" Dorothy said proudly. When the tornado had swept her away to the land of Oz the first time, she had met many strange people who had become her friends—and foes—before she found her way home again. And the Scarecrow was the one she had grown to love the most, and had missed the most. Her only comfort had been to remember that the great—if bumbling—Wizard, who had ruled Oz then, had made the Scarecrow King before departing on his own further adventures.

Dorothy went on up the slope without a backward glance, lost in memories of the last time she had been in Oz.

Behind her, one of the rocks on which she had stepped to shore suddenly opened an eye. It watched in silence as the little girl and the chicken made their way up the hill toward the edge of the forest. When this odd pair was lost from sight, the single staring eye blinked shut and slowly disappeared, until the stone was once more a solid lump of granite.

As Dorothy and Billina reached the forest's edge, their own eyes scanned the trees and shrubs for a sign of something edible. All at once Dorothy stopped, a smile widening on her face. "Oh, Billina, look!" She pointed ahead toward a singularly odd tree growing slightly apart from the rest of the perfectly normal oaks and beeches. Hanging like fruit from the limbs of this odd tree were lunch pails, living versions of the one she had recently lost at the doctor's. Dorothy ran forward, peering up among the leaves, which resembled nothing

more than green napkins, suspended neatly from their centers and rustling softly in the breeze. The pails were clearly in varying stages of ripeness—green, yellow, and red.

"Now I know we're in Oz!" Dorothy exclaimed.

Billina gazed up at the lunch pails critically from beside Dorothy's feet. "Make sure you don't get a green one," the hen instructed.

Dorothy chose one that was a bright, cheery red, on which the word LUNCH stood out in perfectly clear, raised letters. She plucked it from the branch and pried the green leaf-lid from it, peering inside. In the pail were a ham sandwich, a piece of sponge cake, a pickle, a slice of fresh cheese, and an apple. Each of them was attached to the side of the box by a separate stem—waiting to be picked off.

Dorothy sat down beneath the tree and spread the box's contents on the grass, sharing them with Billina. The hen pecked politely at the apple and at bits of bread. The gentle breeze stirred the napkin leaves above their heads and set them rustling again. Dorothy looked up into the branches of the tree, content for the first time in longer than she could remember. "Oh, Billina, we're back in Oz! Now you'll see everything I was talking about that nobody would believe . . . The Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, the Cowardly Lion, the Emerald City . . ."

Billina went on pecking at her food without comment. But she seemed to be listening as Dorothy began to tell the story of her first visit to Oz. For once she was able to tell it all, without anyone interrupting, or trying to make her stop. She told the hen how the tornado carried her off with the old farmhouse and dropped her beyond the rainbow in the magical Land of Oz—right on top of the Wicked Witch of the East, who was terrifying the people of Oz. The Munchkins, a tiny people who lived in the village where she had landed, hailed her as their rescuer, and gave her the witch's ruby slippers. But they couldn't tell her how to get home to Kansas.

So they sent her to the Emerald City, where the great Wizard ruled. Hoping he could send her home, she traveled there with Toto—and on the way she met the three strangers who became friends almost as dear to her as her own family: the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion, who joined her on her quest. Each wanted a heart's desire of his own—wisdom, human feelings, and courage—and hoped the Wizard would grant it.

But the Wicked Witch of the West, the dead witch's sister, was determined to retrieve the ruby slippers at any cost. Even so, Dorothy and her new friends managed to escape from all the traps the witch set and reached the Emerald City, only to be commanded by the Wizard to destroy the witch's evil power, before he would grant their

wishes.

The Wicked Witch of the West, with her terrifying minions of flying apes, soon carried them off to her castle, and almost killed them all. But they had defeated her in the end, and returned to the Wizard to collect their reward.

It was then they discovered that the Wizard was not the all-powerful ruler he had pretended to be. But even though he was not omnipotent, he was still wiser than he seemed. Hadn't he shown Dorothy's three friends that they had possessed within themselves the very things they longed for—and hadn't he given them the far greater gift of self-respect?

The Wizard then promised Dorothy he would take her back to Kansas, for he was planning to return to his own home—a mysterious place called Omaha. But he sailed off in his balloon, inadvertently leaving her behind—and she thought she would never see her home, or her aunt and uncle, again . . . Fortunately the Good Witch Glinda intervened and showed her that she, too, had had all she needed to achieve her heart's desire, all along: the ruby slippers. They had a magical power she never even suspected—the power to grant any wish—and that was why the Wicked Witch of the West had wanted them so badly. So Dorothy wished herself home at last.

And how often, since returning home, had she dreamed of Oz, or heard her friends calling her with the voice of the wind, and longed to wish herself back here again? At last her dream had come true. The people of Oz had needed her before, and now they must need her again. She wondered what problems they were facing this time.

And while she talked and Billina listened, an eye—and then, slowly, a grotesque face—began to take form in the side of a nearby boulder once again; as if the very stones around them were not really solid, but somehow made of living flesh. The face listened with a surreptitious ear and watched with a hooded eye. And then, after a long moment, it reabsorbed, as if an invisible hand had wiped away a putty face, and the stone was as solid as before.

CHAPTER 7

Deep beneath the surface of the Land of Oz, in an underworld of vast, hidden caverns, the putty-face of the mysterious watcher emerged again in a wall of stone. It searched the sulphurous volcanic glow for its master, saw other beings like itself—living creatures of mineral and rock, moving slowly about in the satanic, smoke-hazed caverns. The rock beings went about their individual tasks, sorting gemstones, pouring molten gold and silver; flowing through and into the solid rock as if it were water, far more a part of their world than any of the creatures who lived precariously on its surface. The strange face rolled its eyes and called out in a voice that was urgent but frightened, "Your Majesty . . . she has returned to Oz!"

As a sudden burst of smoke and steam rose from the cavern's depths, a deep, amorphous voice, which seemed to come from the very walls and floors of stone, muttered, "Good . . . good . . . keep an eye on her."

The face hovered, its shape fading and reforming anxiously; knowing that it had been dismissed, knowing that it must say one more thing before it left its audience . . . afraid of that thing.

"What is it?" the heavy voice demanded. "What's the matter?"

The face grimaced. "She has a chicken with her."

Vast billows of smoke burst out of the depths, accompanied by the rumbling groan of stressed rock fracturing. *"A chicken!?"* the voice roared.

Dorothy and Billina wandered on through the forest, searching for a road, or some sort of sign, and not finding one. Dorothy began to be glad that she had thought to pick another lunch pail, in case of the need for a late supper. She was not at all sure they were going to reach the Emerald City by dinnertime, now.

"Well . . . where is everybody?" Billina asked suddenly, the very question she had begun to ask herself. "Where are all your friends?"

"I don't know, Billina," Dorothy answered, trying not to sound as uncertain as she had begun to feel. She tugged on a pigtail. "Oz is pretty big . . . maybe they're off doing something."

"I don't like it," Billina complained irritably.

Dorothy picked her up with a sigh and carried her, hoping the hen was surly simply because she was tired of walking. It was nice to have

a companion that you could talk to, but she would have preferred one with a more agreeable nature. She wondered if all hens would be so critical if they could talk. The worst part was that Billina was right—something here was very wrong. She moved past another rock, like any other rock among hundreds, barely bothering to glance at it . . . never noticing that it followed her with a dark stare of its own.

The way through the forest turned gloomier and more overgrown as they walked. The trees loomed over them, shutting off the sky; the underbrush grew so thick that Dorothy could scarcely see anything along the side of the narrow path she followed. She clung more tightly to Billina as she walked, thinking as her fright grew with each passing step that she didn't want to see what was lurking in the underbrush.

Then, up ahead between the trees, she saw a looming shape that somehow looked familiar. She hurried forward through the woods, into an open space that had once been a clearing. There sat her old house, covered with vines and creepers, one corner driven into the earth as if it had been hurled here by some giant—just where the tornado had dropped it.

"Billina!" Dorothy cried. "It's our old house! The one the tornado blew away! Don't you remember it? This is how I got to Oz the last time." She moved closer to the house, circling it in fascination, peering inside. Chairs and bureaus and beds, spoons and pillows—the furniture and possessions of her family's former life—were all still there inside in a jumbled disarray. Dorothy remembered the time before the tornado had struck, when she had only dreamed that there might be such a place as Oz . . . when her family and the farm had been whole and happy. A sudden hard lump of longing caught in her throat, and for a moment she wished painfully that the house, with everything that belonged in it—including herself—could be safely back in Kansas, and not alone in the heart of a strange, dark wood in an even stranger land.

"This used to be my room," she said to Billina, trying to distract herself. "And that's the kitchen through there." The hen peered inside without comment.

Dorothy stepped back from the window and looked down. "And there's where the Wicked Witch of the East was when I landed on her." There was no sign at all of the witch's body. Dorothy remembered how it had shriveled up and disappeared from sight the moment she had put on the ruby slippers. She turned, looking away across the clearing, a frown of confusion and concern spreading over her face. There was nothing around her but silent, brooding forest now, when there should have been bright flowers and homes and small, laughing people who were barely even her own height. "Where

are all the Munchkins?" she murmured, asking the wind. How could this dreadful forest have spread so quickly, until it seemed as if their land had never been? Time seemed to flow differently in Oz; but could years and years really have passed?

As she turned further, looking past the house, her eyes caught on something else that she had not noticed before: a huge mound of earth and rubble, like a gigantic plowed furrow. She started toward it, filled with sudden dread. As she reached the furrow she stopped and bent down, to pick up the golden yellow brick that lay on the broken earth at her feet. Straightening up again, she saw countless other bricks strewn over the mound of debris, which snaked away into the dark forest until it was lost from sight. Her heart sank into her shoes. "Oh, no!"

Billina waddled up to her side and peered at what she held. "It's just a yellow brick . . ." the hen said, ruffling her feathers in a very human shrug.

But Dorothy dropped the brick, not even hearing her, and began to run forward, stumbling along the ruined remains of the road.

"Dorothy!" Billina squawked. She fluttered and hopped frantically down the road after her mistress, past the watchful gaze of a squat, melon-sized stone. The brooding face stared after them until they were out of sight; and then, slowly, it folded out of existence again.

Dorothy ran on along the ruins of the Yellow Brick Road with tears burning in her eyes. The woods whipped by in a dizzying blur, but she scarcely saw or remembered anything she passed. When she had followed this road before, it had been the grand highway to the fabulous Emerald City, as bright and smooth as if it were paved with gold. Now it seemed as if the very earth had risen up beneath it, and thrown it into chaos. What terrible tragedy could have destroyed it? And what would she find now when she reached its end?

She ran on and on, until her breath came in sobs and her side ached with a cramp, barely even aware of Billina fluttering along behind her as desperately as she was running. She stumbled and fell, as her leaden feet caught on the brick-strewn path; she picked herself up and ran on again. All that mattered now was to find the end of the road and the Emerald City—and to ask the Scarecrow what had happened.

And somewhere deep underground, the watcher's face reformed once more in a cavern wall, this time sparkling with metallic highlights as it searched the luminous fog. "Your Majesty," it said.

"Yes?" the rumbling voice demanded. "What now?"

"They have discovered the Yellow Brick Road and are on their way

to the Emerald City," the watcher reported dutifully.

The voice chuckled. "Good. They won't get past Mombi . . ."

The watcher nodded eagerly and disappeared once more, freed of its duty at last.

It seemed to Dorothy that she had been running for hours, when at last the way ahead began to lighten. The trees thinned suddenly, and she burst from the forest onto an open hillside. She stopped short, stricken, as she looked down across the valley below.

The Emerald City stood on the plain . . . in ruins. Where the most beautiful buildings she had ever seen once stood, catching fire in the sunlight with countless gems, now there was only gray rubble. The few towers still standing had been stripped of their emerald mantle and lay forlornly naked in the sun, drab and pockmarked.

Dorothy stood motionless on the hill, staring down at the ruins. Billina fluttered to her side, and Dorothy leaned down to pick the hen up. She held Billina in her arms and stood silently where she was for another long moment. Then at last she forced her stumbling feet to start them down the hill toward all that remained of the Emerald City.

CHAPTER 8

Dorothy and Billina entered the yawning, unguarded gates of the city, that rose in a great arch like a crescent moon above them. They began to wander through the cavernous maze of the city's ruined streets. Just inside the gates, Dorothy stopped to read a sign scrawled in hasty, sprawling letters on the remains of a wall, "BEWARE . . . THE . . . WHEELERS!" she read aloud.

"What's a Wheeler?" Billina asked.

Dorothy shook her head. There were more strange beings in Oz than she had ever imagined existed; but Wheelers were not among the ones she had seen before. Looking at the sign, she hoped she would never meet one.

She continued on, listening carefully for any sound, but all she could hear was the wind moaning through the ruins. Billina flapped from fallen pillar to post, hopping awkwardly over chunks of broken façade. Dead leaves swirled around their feet as they walked. They seemed to be the only living creatures in the city, but everywhere around them were countless statues of men and women, dressed in their holiday best of ruffles and lace, topcoats and cravats—dressed just like the people who had once lived in the Emerald City . . .

With a sudden cold shudder of fear, Dorothy realized they *were* the people who had lived in Oz. Someone, or something, had turned them all to stone. Standing or fallen, they stood there in eternal silence, frozen in midmotion, celebrating a holiday that was also now frozen forever in time. Dorothy stepped up to the statue of a young girl about her own age, who was dressed in frills and overskirts. The girl clutched a hoop and stick in her hand for a game that would never begin. Dorothy touched the statue's cold stone hand uncertainly.

"What happened?" Billina said.

"They've all been turned to stone!" Dorothy shook her head in amazement. She started on, walking carefully through the overgrown gardens of a park, among motionless top-hatted gentlemen and sightless ladies in bustles who carried lace-trimmed parasols. Suddenly, from somewhere behind her in the ruins, she heard something squeal, like a swing on a rusty chain—or like the gurneys at Dr. Worley's. She stopped, listening. The noise stopped too. After a moment she started on again, moving numbly through the nightmare that had once been her only dream.

Something squealed again. Dorothy stopped; and again the

squealing stopped. She turned, looking around her curiously and a little nervously. Off to one side of the open square she saw a group of young women, dressed in Grecian-style, who had been dancing together in a circle when they were frozen. Dorothy stared at them in horrified fascination. Their heads were all missing.

Billina hopped toward the corner of the street, and craned her neck into the narrow lane beyond. She looked left, and right, at still more ruined walls, their crumbling gray frescoes still bearing traces of green paint. She stepped around the corner. And then she looked up. *"Braaak!"* she screamed.

Dorothy ran to the corner. Turning it, she found Billina crouched in terror—and above her head, an axe waiting to fall. She cried out, flinging up her hands. But the axe did not fall. Then as her eyes dropped away in surprise, she saw who held the axe, and she gasped again.

It was her friend the Tin Woodman, turned to stone like the rest, petrified in a final act of resistance.

"Is that a Wheeler?" Billina shook out her ruffled feathers.

"No, Billina," Dorothy murmured, when she could speak again. "Oh no, Billina, it's the Tin Woodman! Oh, Tin Woodman!" she cried, knowing that he could no more answer her than the headless maidens could. "What's happened? What's happened to everybody?!" She looked past him, and saw his comrade the Cowardly Lion crouched beside him, stone paw outstretched, stone teeth bared in a silent snarl of defiance. She ran to him and threw her arms around his neck, hugging his rigid body, burying her face against his cold stone mane. After a long moment her arms loosened and slipped away again; she stood back, looking down the narrow alley. Her heart pounding, she thought she would see a third familiar form . . . but the gray, silent lane was empty. "Where's the Scarecrow?" she asked uselessly.

She heard another squeal, almost surreptitious this time. Spinning around, she looked back the way she had come. All she could see were the headless young women dancing among the ruins of the open square.

Her eyes started past them, then flickered back as she realized that one of them had suddenly grown a head—and not the head of a pretty girl. The ghastly gray face of a monster stared at her with wild, bulging eyes and a mouth gaping wide in a silent howl.

Dorothy stepped back slowly, glancing toward the alley. The head moved—and from behind the statue, with a faint squeal, glided the most bizarre being she had ever seen, even in Oz. He had the form of a man, except that he walked—or rolled—on all fours. Instead of hands and feet he had a wheel at the end of each arm and leg. The

wheels squealed slightly as the creature rolled forward. Dorothy had no doubt whatsoever that this could only be a Wheeler. He looked up at her, and she realized, with only a small prickle of relief, that his ghastly devil's face was really the top of an ornate helmet. The Wheeler's own face looked more like a human being's, but his eyes were just as wild and outlined with blood red. A mane of yellow hair ran down his back. His clothing seemed to have been made out of scraps and rags, festooned with great loops of ribbon and wire, until he looked like a mad, mangy beast caught in a clothesline.

Dorothy stood where she was, almost petrified like the statues around her, as the creature approached. He seemed almost not to see her, but gazed with fascination at Billina. "Come here, Chicken," he said, with whining sweetness.

"A Wheeler!" Billina shrieked. *"Run, Dorothy, run!"* She fluttered away down the alley.

The Wheeler gave a sharp, wild cry of frustration and came rushing forward. *"Chicken! Chicken! Chicken!"* he screamed.

Dorothy turned and ran after Billina as the Wheeler roared toward her. Looking back over her shoulder as she ran, she saw more and more Wheelers pouring from the ruins, all wearing the same patchwork mockery of a uniform, the same devil-faced helmets. The shrill squealing of hundreds of wheels filled the air like sirens.

Catching up with Billina, Dorothy scooped the hen up in her arms as she ran.

"Over there! *Quickly!"* Billina cried.

Obeying blindly, Dorothy turned into the mouth of another narrow alleyway. This one was barely wide enough for two people to pass abreast, and so overhung with arches and looming walls that it was as dark as a cave. She ran down it, through its forest of ornately carved, cobweb-hung columns, only to find that it ended in a solid wall. She leaped as high as she could, but the wall was much higher. She beat on it futilely with her fist, whimpering with frustration. They were trapped! She turned back despairingly, just in time to see the lead Wheeler entering the alleyway. He screeched to a halt, realizing that she was helpless. He danced with glee, hopping maniacally up and down on his wheels, screaming to his followers: *"Here! Here! Here! Chicken! Chicken!"* Looking back at Dorothy he howled gleefully, *"Got you! Got you! Trapped! Trapped!"*

Frantic with fright, Dorothy turned and tried again to climb the wall, scraping her hands painfully on the hard stone as she did. Its smooth face gave her no hand- or foot-hold. But suddenly, face to face with its surface, she saw the thin outline of a door.

More and more Wheelers were crowding into the alleyway behind

her. They all screamed together in frenzied delight, a gang of taunting bullies, reveling in her futile attempts to escape. Their eerie screaming made her shudder. Still more Wheelers began to skim along the broken walls and rooftops high above her; they seemed to multiply out of nowhere.

Dorothy pushed with all her strength on the door in the wall, but it would not open. There was no knob to pull, and the crack was not wide enough to get her fingers into. Then, suddenly, her fingers found a keyhole she had not noticed before.

She pushed her hand into the pocket of her dress and pulled out the key that she had found in Kansas. Fitting it into the lock with clumsy fingers, she turned it. She heard the *click* as the lock opened, and suddenly the door swung outward, revealing a darkened room.

The Wheelers' screaming turned to wails and shrieks of sudden alarm. They rushed down the tight alleyway toward her in a mob, wild to keep her from escaping. But Dorothy and Billina dashed into the darkness, pulling the door shut behind them with a resounding *thud.* The pack of Wheelers screeched to a halt outside the door, howling like wild dogs with rage and disappointment.

Gasping with relief, Dorothy pressed her back against the solidly closed door. Looking around her, she found that they were in a small, dark room, illuminated only by the light that found its way in through a high, round window. Dorothy held the key in the palm of her hand, looking at it in wonder. She had been right! This *was* a key sent to her from Oz. And somehow Billina had known the way to the proper door, or they might never have found the proper keyhole. She was certain now that they had both been meant to make this journey.

"You'll have to come out sooner or later," the lead Wheeler howled outside, "and when you do, we'll tear you into little bits and throw you into the Deadly Desert!"

Dorothy put the key carefully into her pocket and peered out through the keyhole. She jerked back in surprise, as she saw the red-ringed eye of the lead Wheeler peering back at her. "We haven't done anything to you!" she cried, angry and still frightened by the sight of him. "Who are you, anyway!"

"Haven't done anything?!" the lead Wheeler shrilled. "Isn't that a stolen lunch pail in your hand? Isn't that a *chicken* in there with you?"

Dorothy glanced down and realized to her surprise that she was somehow still carrying the pail.

"Chicken. Chicken. Chicken. Chicken!" the Wheelers screamed hysterically, all together.

Dorothy looked at Billina in surprise, as the lead Wheeler snarled, "No one is allowed to pick a lunch pail without the permission of us

Wheelers. And the Nome King doesn't allow chickens anywhere in Oz."

Billina flapped her wings indignantly. "Who is the Nome King?" Dorothy asked.

"He is the new ruler of Oz!" the Wheeler cried.

"But the Scarecrow—"

"The *Scarecrow?"* the lead Wheeler screeched.

"The SCAREcrow??" all the Wheelers howled. They roared with crazy laughter. "Too late!" they shrieked. *"Toolatetoolatetoolate!"*

"What do you mean, 'too late'?" Dorothy asked unhappily.

"What do you mean?" they mocked her in an echoing frenzy. *"What do you mean? What do you mean? What do you mean?"* They circled one another in a whirling, dizzy dance of triumph, then began to roll away down the alley, their maniacal laughter trailing after them. Two of them remained behind to guard the door.

Dorothy watched them go, unable to tear her gaze from the keyhole. She frowned, frightened and distressed and not certain what to do next.

"What are we going to do now, Dorothy?" Billina echoed her thoughts.

She turned back to the hen—and started in surprise. Now that her eyes had adjusted to the dim light, they suddenly showed her the shadowy form of a third person standing in the room.

Dorothy recoiled against the door, uncertain whether she would now have to run out and face the Wheelers again, but the figure did not move. "What is it?" Billina asked.

"I don't know," Dorothy said, as her curiosity got the better of her and she moved forward to investigate.

The figure was that of a small man, barely her own height, and made entirely out of copper.

Timidly Dorothy moved closer to the strange man, seeing that he did look very much like something—perhaps a snowman—made of copper kettles. His body and head were as round as balls, and his short, sturdy legs had springs at the knees for flexibility. On his head he wore a flat, military-looking helmet, and his beaten-copper mustache bristled in a precise, soldierly fashion. And yet his large eyes, which were made of two perfect emeralds, were thoughtful and really rather kind, if somewhat expressionless at the moment. He stood perfectly still as she approached, not even blinking. He seemed to have been standing there, or somewhere, for some time, for his copper body had oxidized until it was streaked with an opalescent patina of flame reds and mossy greens.

Dorothy read the small metal plaque riveted to his chest like a medal. *"Royal . . . Army . . . of . . . Oz,"* she murmured. A tiny smile lifted the corners of her mouth. At least she knew he was a friend—or would be, if he were able to say so. She moved around his spherical form until she found another plaque on his back. "Listen, Billina," she said, with sudden excitement, "here are some directions." She read them aloud, tracing the words with her finger. *"Patented Clockwork Mechanical Man . . . does everything but live . . . For thinking, wind No.* 1 *under left arm. For speaking, wind No.* 2 *under right arm. For walking and action, wind No.* 3 *in middle of back. Guaranteed to work perfectly for 1000 years!"*

"You don't believe *that,* do you?" Billina muttered.

Dorothy shrugged. "I don't know. I'll wind him up, and we'll see . . ." She searched for one of the keys described in the instructions. Under the mechanical man's left arm she found one marked THINKING. She turned it slowly—it was stiff with disuse—listening to the ratcheting sound as a spring coiled somewhere inside him. When the key would wind no further she let it go and watched it begin to unwind again, ever so slowly. She heard something ticking like a clock inside him.

She stood waiting, with Billina at her side. Billina peered up at the mechanical soldier with a skeptical eye. "He doesn't seem very different."

"Of course not," Dorothy said, suddenly remembering that she had only wound up one of his three keys. "I wound up his thought key, so he's only thinking now."

"I wonder what he's thinking about," the hen said, looking back at her expectantly.

"I'll wind up his speech, and then maybe he can tell us." Dorothy found the next key under the copper man's right arm. It was marked SPEECH. She began to wind it. "Maybe he knows what happened to the Emerald City."

A second ticking sound joined the first. The mechanical man's emerald eyes blinked suddenly, and his copper mustache twitched. Dorothy moved around in front of him to get a better view.

"Good morn-ing, lit-tle girl," the copper man said. His voice echoed up from somewhere deep in his hollow interior.

"Good morning, sir," Dorothy answered, remembering her manners.

"Thank-you for res-cu-ing me," he wheezed, sounding like someone who had just finished running a long race. His voice seemed to be worked by a bellows, like the squeaking toy cat that lay in her room back in Kansas; he swallowed some of his words again as he spoke.

"You're welcome," Dorothy said, trying to appear as grown-up and

confident as the situation seemed to require. "It was my friend Billina who found the key to this place."

"Bil-lina?" the copper man asked, roiling his eyes and trying to see more of the room.

"Over here," Billina said, fluffing up her feathers.

"Good morning, Mrs. Hen," the copper man said formally. He looked at Dorothy again, his eyes brightening. "Are you . . . Dorothy Gale?"

"Yes, sir," Dorothy answered, surprised.

The copper man's mustache twitched with relief. "Pleased to meet you. I am Tik-Tok, the Royal Army of Oz. His Majesty the Scare-crow told me about you."

Dorothy's frown returned, as she abruptly remembered their present plight. "What's happened to the Emerald City, Mr. Tok? And where *is* the Scarecrow?"

Tik-Tok looked as if he wished he could shake his head. "I don't know," he said heavily. "Suddenly every-thing living began to turn to stone, and His Majesty the Scarecrow locked me in here and told me to wait for you. When you did not ar-rive, I called for help un-til my voice ran down, then I paced back and forth un-til my ac-tion ran down, then I stood and thought un-til my thought ran down. After that, I remember nothing until you wound me up. Where did you find the key to this place?"

"Over near the hog trough," Billina volunteered.

"Hog . . . trough?" Tik-Tok murmured, nonplussed.

"In Kansas," Dorothy said helpfully. "If you don't mind, Mr. Tok, I'll wind up your action."

The copper man beamed. "That will please me very much," he wheezed. "You may call me Tik-Tok."

Dorothy stepped behind him and began to wind up the ACTION key.

Billina stood before him, peering up at his rotund profile. "Why weren't you turned to stone like everybody else?"

"Because I am not a-live, and never will be, thank good-ness," Tik-Tok said, with an air of firm satisfaction.

Dorothy came around to stand in front of Tik-Tok again, happy and relieved that the Scarecrow had sent her such a solid-looking ally. She put her hands on her hips. "Well, Tik-Tok, the first thing we have to do is escape from the Wheelers. They're outside, and they said they'd throw us into the Deadly Desert." She pointed toward the door.

Tik-Tok raised his hands, his joints stiff and his movements jerky with long disuse, and removed his copper helmet. He bowed gallantly before Dorothy. "From now on, I will be your o-bedient servant . . . if

you keep me wound up," he added, as a cautious reminder. "Make sure my think-works are tight, and I will for-mu-late a plan."

Dorothy rewound his THINKING key as tightly as she could, and Tik-Tok moved awkwardly toward the door, the springs in his knees squeaking softly as he limbered his legs. He peered out through the keyhole for a long moment. "A-ha," he murmured. He looked back at Dorothy, who stood still holding the lunch pail. "A-ha," he said again, and nodded.

CHAPTER 9

Tik-Tok opened the door to their hiding place slowly, an inch at a time, and looked out. The two Wheelers lay on the ground before him, curled up like enormous dogs, snoring loudly.

Tik-Tok looked back at Dorothy and extended his hand. She handed him the lunch pail. His stubby copper fingers closed over its stout wooden handle, and he shoved the door open. Dorothy and Billina followed him as he stepped into the alley.

The Wheelers woke and scrambled up at the sound of the door opening, then began to shriek like sirens. Their wheels screeched as they rushed forward to attack him.

But the moment the first Wheeler was within striking range, Tik-Tok swung the lunch pail furiously. It struck the Wheeler's head with a resounding *clang!* The Wheeler howled and tumbled over onto his side; then floundered up again, and rolled away as fast as his squealing wheels would go. The second Wheeler turned and fled as well, yelping like a terrified hound.

"These Wheelers are very mis-chievous," Tik-Tok said mildly, not needing to add that they were scarcely a match for a disciplined soldier of his training.

Dorothy clapped her hands. Billina cackled with delight and flew up to perch triumphantly on Tik-Tok's helmet. The three companions walked boldly out of the alley and back toward the square where Dorothy had seen the headless dancers.

They passed the stone figures of the Tin Woodman and the Cowardly Lion, and Tik-Tok looked around him in dismay at the devastation of the city. "Oh my good-ness . . ." he murmured, words failing him. Even though he was a machine, he was completely devoted to Oz, and he could not help but share its loss.

They continued on toward the square, descending the wide, vine-traced steps past a smiling young man in a top hat, who stood frozen in the act of admiring the headless dancers below him. Tik-Tok stopped again at the foot of the steps as Dorothy and Billina froze, hearing the familiar telltale sound of squealing wheels.

Abruptly the empty square around them began to fill, as howling Wheelers bore down on them from three sides. Tik-Tok gestured behind him. Dorothy caught up Billina; clutching the hen tightly in her arms, she darted back up the steps. They stood as still as the stone-faced young man beside them, watching breathlessly, safely out

of the way, as Tik-Tok prepared for battle.

As the Wheelers charged closer, Tik-Tok planted his feet firmly on the ground and began to spin from the waist. The lunch pail swung like a runaway merry-go-round horse as the top hemisphere of his body whirled completely around, faster and faster. The pail crashed into the helmeted heads of the swarming Wheelers as they closed in on him. The rattles and bangs when heads and pail collided were more deafening than the howls of his astonished attackers. Utter chaos followed. The Wheelers broke away and fled in panic, tripping and knocking each other down in their terror—more frightened by the noise of the unexpected resistance than they were hurt by it, although that hardly mattered to anyone.

The lead Wheeler fled screaming with the rest, the biggest bully and the biggest coward of all; but he stumbled over his own wheels in his fright, and fell sprawling onto his back on the broken pavement.

Before he could catch his breath and struggle up again, Tik-Tok was on top of him. Tik-Tok's hand seized him by the cloth of his patchwork jacket, hauling him to his wheels, holding him prisoner.

The Wheeler floundered and trembled, rolling his wild eyes as Tik-Tok pulled him up. "You'll be *sorry* for treating me this way," he whined furiously. "I'm a terrible fierce person." He bared his teeth.

"I am only a ma-chine," Tik-Tok said, unimpressed, "so I can-not be sorry or happy, no matter what happens . . ."

Dorothy stood before her former persecutor, her hands clenched in fists. "What happened to the Emerald City? And who is the Nome King?"

The Wheeler gulped visibly with dread, his red-ringed eyes searching the empty square for something he seemed to fear even more than Tik-Tok.

Tik-Tok shook him briskly, the way Toto would have shaken a rat, until the Wheeler's teeth rattled like hailstones on a windowpane.

"He is the n-n-new ruler of Oz!" the Wheeler cried. "He c-conquered the Emerald City and took away all the emeralds and turned everyone to stone."

Dorothy stood stunned for a long moment. She wasn't certain if this was worse than she had feared—because she wasn't sure *what* she had feared—but it sounded bad enough. "Where is the Scarecrow?" she asked again, her throat tight.

"Gone!" the Wheeler gasped. "The only one who knows where he is, is Mmmmmm . . . mmm . . . mmm . . ." His eyes glazed and his mouth refused to form the word, no matter how he tried. "Mmmmmm . . . mmm . . ." he stammered, while Tik-Tok fixed him with a level, ominous gaze. Tik-Tok pulled the Wheeler closer, his hand twisting

the ribbons and wires that bedecked his coat. “Princessss Mombi!” the Wheeler burst out at last.

“Mombi?” Billina said, in a tone of voice that suggested it was not a name any respectable citizen of Kansas would have.

“I don’t remember her,” Dorothy said, shaking her head. “What does she look like?”

The Wheeler squirmed, peering past them nervously. “She n-n-never looks the same,” he jabbered. “She used to be just plain Mombi, the witch. But then she helped the Nome King conquer Oz, and he made her a princess and gave her the Emerald City . . . what’s left of it.”

Dorothy thought a moment. If Mombi ruled the Emerald City, then she was the most logical person to seek out next. Dorothy had the distinct feeling that this Mombi might be even worse to deal with than the Wheelers, considering how frightened the lead Wheeler seemed to be of her. And if she never looked the same, how would they even be able to recognize her?

But then, Tik-Tok had shown her that the Wheelers were only cowardly bullies, after all. Maybe Mombi would be no worse. Surely they could find a way to make her tell them where the Scarecrow was. “Where does Princess Mombi live?” Dorothy asked.

The lead Wheeler whined miserably, having given them far more information already than was healthy for one of Mombi’s minions. Once he and the other Wheelers had roamed the roads of Oz, wild and reckless, but basically harmless. Then Mombi and the Nome King had conquered their land, and the Wheelers had been forced to serve Mombi; their only other choice was to be turned to stone along with everyone else. They did the witch’s bidding now and lived in terror of her magical enchantments. But serving her had not made the lead Wheeler any braver. And Tik-Tok was here in front of him now, and Mombi was somewhere else—and not about to save him. After a few more brisk shakes and threats, the lead Wheeler reluctantly led his captors on a course through the ruins.

At last they arrived at the gates of a great palace. The building was still impressive, in spite of the gaping holes in its façade where emeralds had once gleamed. The Wheeler stopped and pointed, and the small group walked together up the wide pathway to its entrance. Tik-Tok still dragged the Wheeler by his coattails, like a dog on a leash. A large golden knocker was mounted at the center of the ornate circular scrollwork on one of the heavy doors. Dorothy rapped loudly.

The lead Wheeler strained against Tik-Tok’s grasp; far more terrified of suddenly facing his mistress than his captors were. “Now can I go? Please, please, pleeese?” he wailed.

Tik-Tok’s head swiveled on his neck to look questioningly at

Dorothy. She saw the absolute terror in the mad creature's bulging eyes and felt a kind of pity stir in her. He plainly believed that Mombi would do something awful to him for his betrayal—and he was probably right. "Yes," she said with a nod. "Let him go, Tik-Tok."

The mechanical man let go of the Wheeler's coattails somewhat reluctantly. "Be-have yourself, now," he intoned.

"Oh, I will," the Wheeler jabbered. "I will behave! Behave!" He backed away from the door with frantic speed, stumbling over the rubble with ignominious clumsiness. Back on his wheels in less than an instant, he spun around and sped away. "Behave!" he hooted hysterically. "Behave! Behave! Behave!" They could hear his lunatic laughter echoing as he disappeared down the deserted streets.

CHAPTER 10

Dorothy turned back to the massive palace doors. No one had come to answer her knock, and so she put her hand on the latch and pressed. To Dorothy's surprise, the doors opened. To her even greater surprise, the sweet, peaceful sound of mandolin music reached her ears from somewhere inside.

Dorothy, Tik-Tok, and Billina entered the vestibule cautiously and found it empty. They moved on through one deserted, silent room after another, up stairways and along halls, following the music deeper and deeper into the palace's heart. The rooms were not the empty ruins that the rest of the city had become. The carpets were faded and dust webs marred the walls, but room after room was still filled with beautiful paintings and ornate furniture. They reached the throne room at last, and found a filigreed silver door blocking their way.

Dorothy halted, uncertain. Abruptly the door began to slide open, separating into thirds—the two sides sliding apart, the top third rising, their shape reminding her of an immense *M* as they parted. They stepped slowly through the opening, and Dorothy caught her breath as she saw the room beyond, the most beautiful one they had yet seen. Pillars of silver and golden chairs with seats of red velvet, chandeliers like crystal waterfalls, were everywhere, reflected over and over and over again in the perfect mirrors that lined the walls of the enormous rectangular chamber. The ceiling and floor were polished silver. Billina peered down at her own reflection in fascination, and scratched at it with her foot.

And in the very center of the room, reclining on a throne of gold and velvet, sat a beautiful fair-haired young woman. She did not look up at them, but sat playing a gentle melody on her mandolin. She was dressed in a darkly beautiful gown of emerald, amethyst, and ruby velvet brocaded with gold and glittering jewels. A dark velvet cape fell away from her shoulders; its collar of golden feathers rose up in fragile spikes, framing her face like long-fingered hands. She looked like a fabulous bird, with the mandolin's song filling the air around her. A curious key carved from a blood-red ruby dangled from her wrist.

Dorothy, Tik-Tok, and Billina stopped just inside the doorway, staring in astonishment. Behind them the filigreed door slid shut again with a soft *click.* The young woman still did not look up, or even seem

to have noticed their arrival. She sat where she was, slowly turning her head as she glanced at her reflection in one mirror after another, completely absorbed by the beauty of her own features repeated hundreds of times in walls, ceiling, and floor.

Dorothy recovered from her shock at the sight of the beautiful woman and started forward. The mandolin player did not look like the evil witches she had met before in Oz—only the good ones had been beautiful; as if inner goodness or wickedness was somehow reflected in the entire being of a witch. Something that was certainly not the case with most people, Dorothy had found, either in Oz or in Kansas. This lovely young woman looked the way Dorothy had always imagined a princess would look, but she certainly did not fit the image of a witch Dorothy had expected. But then, hadn't the Wheeler said Mombi never looked the same way twice . . . ? "Pardon us, Miss," Dorothy asked uncertainly, "but are you Princess Mombi?"

The young woman stopped playing and glanced up at last, seeming not at all surprised to find a little girl standing before her. She nodded and yawned, and extended a languorous hand. "Help me to rise."

Dorothy helped her to her feet obediently; although from Mombi's grip on her shoulder, she thought a bit irritably, the Princess was not only very heavy but perfectly strong enough to get up by herself. "I'll put on something more appropriate," the Princess said, rather absently. "Ask your friends to wait here." She moved slowly across the silver floor, leaning heavily on Dorothy's small shoulder at every step. Her long dark gown trailed behind them like a shadow.

Another door opened among the mirrors on the walls, and the Princess led Dorothy through it into her sleeping chamber. Dorothy gazed in awe at the great oval bed heaped with satin comforters that lay in the center of the room. Above it, a stained-glass dome of blue and white glowed with hidden light. At the other end of the room they passed through another doorway into a large, circular dressing room. Another stained-glass dome lit this room, and around its walls in a wide arc lay almost three dozen elegantly carved cabinets covered with gold leaf; each one had a glass door and a golden number. Dorothy stopped in her tracks, staring in disbelief. Cabinet Number 31 had an opaque door, making its contents invisible, and Number 25 was empty. But in each of the others sat the head of a beautiful young woman. Dorothy stood staring, fascinated and horrified, as the Princess walked on across the room alone. The eyes in the heads followed her progress silently.

"I think Number Four will do for this afternoon," the Princess murmured to herself. Lifting her hands to her own head, she pulled it from her shoulders with a slight tug, then placed it carefully inside the

empty cabinet. Her neck, where the head had been, was smooth and unbroken as a mannequin's beneath the many strands of her golden, jeweled necklace.

She walked over to Cabinet Number 4 with perfect ease, although Dorothy could not imagine how she found her way headless. Perhaps all the heads were seeing for her. Dorothy shuddered. The Princess unlocked the door with her ruby key and picked the new head unerringly from the shelf. It had long, shining black curls piled high in an elaborate hairdo, dark, sparkling eyes, and a pale complexion as luminous as a pearl. It looked at Dorothy as the Princess held it up, and said, "What do you think?" in a throaty voice.

Dorothy gulped, swallowing her astonishment. "I think it is very beautiful," she said weakly.

"I should hope so," the head replied, with a slight, insouciant motion between the Princess's hands. Suddenly Dorothy had no doubt that this must be Mombi; and she knew now why the witch never looked the same twice. "And just who might you be?" Mombi asked at last. There was something oddly familiar about her voice and manner, though certainly not about any of her heads. She raised the head in her hands to her shoulders as Dorothy opened her mouth to answer.

"I'm Dorothy Gale from Kansas."

Princess Mombi settled the head firmly on her neck, then peered closely at the young girl standing across the room. "Dorothy Gale?" she repeated. "Come to me."

Dorothy moved forward obediently to stand before the Princess. Mombi studied her face carefully, the way an artist might study a potential still life.

"What happened to make the Emerald City like this, and where is the Scarecrow?" Dorothy demanded, ignoring Mombi's rude gaze.

"The Nome King took the Scarecrow and all the emeralds back to his mountain, and turned everyone else to stone," Mombi said casually, as if she were discussing the weather. She hesitated a moment, caught Dorothy's chin and turned her face from side to side. "You will be rather attractive . . . one day. Not at all beautiful, you understand, but you will have a certain prettiness . . . different from my other heads." She let go of Dorothy's chin. "I believe I'll lock you in the tower for a few years until your head is ready, and then I'll take it!" Her eyes flashed with sudden malevolence.

"I believe you will not!" Dorothy backed away indignantly. She turned and started to run, but Mombi leaped after her like lightning and caught her wrist in a grip of iron. The Princess dragged the squirming, struggling girl back through her sleeping chamber.

"Tik-Tok!" Dorothy shouted. "Billina! Help!"

Mombi led Dorothy, still helplessly trapped in the vise of her grasp, past the ornate bed and on toward the throne room.

"Help!" Dorothy cried again, in fright and warning, as she glimpsed her friends through the chamber's door. They looked up at her and at the now-changed Princess with surprise and distress. Billina launched into the air with a squawk of outrage and flew across the throne room toward the doorway. The chicken attacked the witch furiously with wings and beak, as Dorothy kicked desperately at Mombi's shins, trying to break free. "You let her go!" Billina shrilled, a mother hen fighting to protect her chick.

But Mombi's free hand shot out, with the same terrifying speed and strength, and seized the chicken too. Holding the wildly struggling hen close against her side, she growled, *"You* I'll have fried for breakfast!"

Dorothy looked back through the doorway at the sound of Tik-Tok's heavy metallic footfalls ringing on the mirrored floor. She saw him advancing as quickly as his stubby, spring-kneed legs would carry him. "I'm coming, Dorothy!" he cried, swinging the lunch pail.

Mombi hauled Dorothy and Billina into the throne room, to be confronted by Tik-Tok, his mustache bristling furiously and the lunch pail raised for a devastating blow.

But suddenly, in midswing, his arm stopped moving. He stood frozen where he was, and the blow did not fall.

For a moment Mombi stood frozen too, frowning in angry surprise, Dorothy and Billina held motionless at her sides.

"My ac-tion has run down!" Tik-Tok wheezed, with what sounded surprisingly like dismay.

The Princess laughed wickedly. She dragged her squirming captives past the frozen mechanical man.

"This is too bad," Tik-Tok muttered mournfully, trying without success to turn his head as they passed. "I sup-pose my fight with the Wheelers made me run down fast-er than usual."

Dorothy looked back at him over her shoulder. "It couldn't be helped, Tik-Tok!" she called reassuringly.

Mombi jerked open another mirrored door somewhere along the wall—Dorothy wondered fleetingly if all the mirrors hid doors. This one opened on a spiraling flight of stairs, which led upward. Mombi yanked Dorothy and Billina through it and began to drag them up the steps. The door swung shut behind them, hiding Tik-Tok from view. "What will you do with Tik-Tok?" Dorothy asked, looking back helplessly, more worried about the paralyzed copper man now than she was about herself.

"People will think I have a new statue," Mombi snapped, and chuckled hoarsely at her own joke. The stairway was growing narrower, and its roof lower; the carved faces of lovely young women looked down silently from wooden pillars as they passed. The stairway's twists and turns coiled more treacherously as they neared the top of the tower.

Dorothy stood panting and out of breath as the Princess stopped at last before a heavy mahogany door and pushed the door open. Suddenly Mombi jerked Dorothy forward and pushed her roughly through the doorway, tossing the chicken in after her.

Dorothy spun around, barely keeping her balance, as the door slammed shut behind her. She heard the loud *chunk* of a bolt being set as Mombi locked them in. "Dorothy Gale from Kansas!" Mombi muttered, beyond the door. With a snort of scorn she started back down the stairs. Her footsteps faded away, and they were left alone in utter silence.

CHAPTER 11

Dorothy turned away from the door, her shoulders drooping as she gazed around her prison. It must have been a grand and beautiful room once, perhaps some real princess's private chamber. But plainly no one had lived here for years—the room had a stuffy, musty odor that made her wrinkle her nose. It looked as if the room had been stripped of everything Mombi had wanted, and then used as a storage closet, into which she had dumped things for later use. Dorothy's hand rose slowly to her throat, remembering the closets and the heads inside. Dust lay in a pale blanket over the furniture and carpets. Little balls of dust perched like kittens on the tops of tables, the seats of the chairs, and the two faded satin sofas. Cobwebs festooned the corners of the room, the undersides of tables, and the austere figure of a grandfather clock.

At the far end of the room were high French windows framed by long, heavy curtains, whose once-graceful fall was now sagging with dust and decay.

Dorothy crossed the room to the windows and tried to look out. Even the glass was filmed with dust. She rubbed the pane with her fingertips, clearing a small patch so that she could see clearly. Down below her were the ruins of the Emerald City. Away to the west, beyond its broken walls, was the forest she had come through, and beyond the trees she could make out the shimmering edge of the Deadly Desert. And even farther away, unimaginably distant across those terrible wastes, loomed a vast, gleaming black mountain clad in blinding ice and snow. Simply to see it made her shiver; there was something so sinister about its form.

She did not remember that mountain from her previous visit to Oz. She was sure it had not been there before. She could only think of one reason why it was there now: "The Nome King?" she whispered. Her heart sank. *That* was where the Scarecrow was being held prisoner? *That* was where she would have to go to save him and the people of Oz?

Billina flapped her wings and smoothed her ruffled feathers with her beak. "If this is Oz, Dorothy," she said peevishly, "I'd rather take my chances back in Kansas."

Dorothy felt a pang of longing pierce her own heart, as she thought of her home. How eager she had been to escape from her problems there and return to Oz! But in her unhappiness, she had forgotten that

when she had been in Oz before she had been frightened and lonely and homesick as often as she had been happy and excited. Kansas might be dull sometimes, and the people there might not understand . . . but those people loved her more than anything, and held her safe and close in their arms. Oz was more wonderful and more beautiful than any place she had ever dreamed of—but it could also be frightening and heartless to a lost little girl. "Oh, Billina," she said, staring out across the desert, "if only we could just fly away, like you . . ."

"Only in my younger days, my dear." The plump old hen shook her head sadly.

Dorothy turned back at last, looking around their prison again, feeling her lips begin to tremble and her eyes fill with sudden tears. She wiped her face with a dusty hand, wiping away bits of sticky web-thread. As she did, her wandering eyes found the enormous painting that hung askew on the wall beside the locked door.

In the portrait were three figures as familiar to her as Aunt Em and Uncle Henry: The Scarecrow, smiling benignly beneath his crown, his wide, button eyes looking remarkably wise; beside him the Tin Woodman, his metal figure shining with pride and polish; and the Cowardly Lion, in peaceful repose, but with a manic glint of courage in his eye. Dorothy suddenly realized that this palace must once have belonged to the Scarecrow himself, and that the room where she was being held prisoner now must once have been his private study.

With a sudden pang she understood how much the three friends who had posed together for that painting still meant to her. They were her family here. So now she must be brave, and do everything she possibly could to help them, just as she would if Aunt Em or Uncle Henry were in trouble . . .

"Mom?" a voice asked, quite unexpectedly, from somewhere near the picture. Dorothy started, and Billina fluttered up with a squawk of surprise, seeing no one there at all.

But then, looking more carefully, Dorothy noticed the drooping potted palm, brown with neglect and hung with spiderwebs, that sat in a corner below the painting. Behind the palm, heaped against the wall like a pile of cast-off broomsticks, was a very thin, very strange-looking person who seemed to have come apart at the joints.

His head was a great, lustrous, orangy-red globe. His eyes were round and dark, his nose was three-cornered, and his mouth was shaped like a ragged half-moon, turned up at the corners in a grin despite his awkward position. His face was not what anyone in Kansas would have called beautiful, but his smile was so broad, and so cheerful, that Dorothy felt her sorrow fade as she looked back at him.

Dorothy started across the room to the stranger's side, noticing as she got closer that he seemed to be made out of sticks. His fragile body was in terrible shape—a wreck, in fact—as if he had been thrown against the wall with great force. His separated joints stuck out at awkward angles from his clothes. Dorothy wondered if it hurt him to be that way, but there was no sign of discomfort on his grinning face. His tangled clothes were bizarre and almost cheerful in their own right—purple uniform trousers with a red stripe running up their legs, a pink shirt with white polka dots, a red vest and an olive green scarf, high-topped shoes . . .

"Mom?" he said again.

"I'm Dorothy Gale," Dorothy said. She had never been taken for anyone's mother before.

"Oh." The stranger's expression didn't change, but his voice seemed vaguely disappointed. "For a second there, you looked like my mom."

Billina had moved closer to him along with Dorothy. Still keeping a safe distance, she craned her neck to study him with a beady eye. "What is this . . . a man or a melon?"

"A pumpkin, if you please," the stranger said, his manner polite but slightly indignant. "My name is Jack . . . Jack Pumpkinhead. May I ask a favor of you, Dorothy?" Jack asked diffidently.

"Yes," Dorothy said, glad for anything that would take her mind off of her own predicament.

"Would you help put me back together again?"

Dorothy nodded and kneeled down beside him, picking through the pile of sticks and clothes to see if she could sort them out. As she straightened and twisted the pieces of wood, Jack asked suddenly, rather nervously, "Would you also please check my head for signs of spoiling?"

Dorothy reached up obligingly, and took his smooth orange head between her hands. She turned it gently from side to side, and peeked behind it, looking for any spots that were not firm and bright. Billina peered past her shoulder, giving the stranger's head a surreptitious double-checking with her own practiced eye.

"Is it all orange?" Jack asked anxiously.

"Very," Dorothy said.

"Would you check inside, please?"

Dorothy removed his cap by its raspy brown stem, and peered inside. Billina poked her own beak into the hollow. "Looks pretty empty to me," she remarked. Her voice reverberated faintly, proving her point.

"Any brown spots?" Jack asked again.

“No, sir.” Dorothy set his cap back in place, straightening the leaves that perched rakishly on its stem, and began to sort through his limbs again. She found an arm that ended in a three-fingered twig hand, and pushed it up into his sleeve.

“Oh, thank you, little girl,” Jack said, with great feeling. “I am so grateful to you. I have been alive such a short while, and I’m afraid of my life ending before I have seen anything of the world.”

Dorothy looked up into his smiling face, which showed nothing of his inner thoughts or fears to the world. It suddenly occurred to her that she knew no more about him than what his face revealed. “May I ask you something, Jack?” she said, hoping she would not embarrass him.

But he seemed to sense her questions before she had even asked: “How did I come to be? And what am I doing here?”

She nodded, pushing his other arm into his other sleeve.

“One day, my mother—a girl who looked a lot like you . . .” The pumpkinhead twisted to look down at her again. “You’re sure you’re not my mom?”

“I’m sure, Jack,” Dorothy said. That was one thing she was certain of, at least. She fitted a pin into Jack’s knee joint, to fasten it together.

Jack went on grinning emptily. “Well,” he said, resigned to her reply, “my mother made me to scare that awful witch, Mombi. My mother was her slave, you see. Mombi had gone to the market and my mother built me and stood me in a place where Mombi would meet me face to face. Along Mombi came and sure enough, she was scared, but then she was also very angry! She has a *terrible* temper!”

“I know,” Dorothy said ruefully. She fastened his other knee together and buttoned his vest.

“She was about to destroy me with her stick—I was not alive then, you understand”—Jack rattled on, lost in his few memories, as Dorothy finished his reassembly—“when she decided to test some of the Marvelous Powder of Life she had just bought from a magician. She did. It worked.” Jack climbed carefully to his feet. “And here I am.” Standing at his full height, he was very tall indeed. Dorothy had to bend her head back to look up at him. He took a few stiff but dignified steps, moving with obvious pride in his bearing.

“The Powder of Life?” Dorothy asked, watching him move his wooden arms and legs.

“You sprinkle it on something, and the thing comes to life,” Jack explained.

“Does Mombi have any more of it?” Dorothy asked, with sudden eagerness. Something that could turn a pumpkin and a pile of twigs

into a person must be something that they could use to help them escape from this tower.

Jack bent his head in concentration. “If she does, it’s downstairs in Cabinet Thirty-one . . .” he said slowly, as if he were not sure where the thought had come from.

“Is that why she keeps it closed?” Dorothy asked, remembering the one cabinet in the room full of heads that kept its contents hidden behind a mirrored door.

“I suppose so . . .” Jack shrugged, twitching like a puppet.

Dorothy turned slowly, looking around her at the odd assortment of furniture and bric-a-brac the tower room held. Considering their possibilities, she tried to get a clear picture of the plan her mind was forming. If they were to reach the Nome King’s mountain, they would have to have something that could fly over the Deadly Desert . . .

Billina flapped her way up onto the back of an overstuffed chair, until she was close enough to Jack’s head that she didn’t need to squawk to be heard. “What happened to your mother?” she asked, half in sympathy and half out of suspicion.

A deep, unexpected sob burst from Jack’s grinning head. “She vanished . . .” he murmured. “I think Mombi enchanted her, which is why I am so sad. After that, Mombi threw me in this corner and said she was going to make a pie of me.” Billina clucked sympathetically, remembering Mombi’s similar threat about herself. “But she was wearing Head Twenty-two at the time,” Jack went on, “and I don’t think she’s worn it since. So she hasn’t remembered I’m up here.”

Dorothy stared across the room at the antlered head of a woebegone green mooselike creature mounted above the carved stone mantelpiece. She looked down at the sofa beneath it, then back at Jack—and at the withered royal palm drooping in its pot beside him. The palm’s leaves looked rather like great feathered wings . . . She put the various pieces of furniture together in her mind, trying to imagine how they would look as a living creature . . . She nodded once, in satisfaction. “Jack, Billina!” she turned back to the others, her face bright with sudden excitement. “Listen—here’s what we have to do . . .”

CHAPTER 12

They waited until the sky outside the French windows had been black and star-filled for a long time, when Dorothy was sure that even Mombi must be asleep. Then she directed Jack to reach through the narrow, filigreed window in the mahogany door, and lift the bolt. His impossibly long and thin arm squeezed through easily, and he began to search for the heavy wooden bar. Dorothy stood beside him, staring at the small but unmistakable scarecrow faces carved into the elaborate whorled design of the heavy door. After groping in the darkness on the other side for several seconds, Jack's twig fingers found the beam at last. Struggling, he unbarred the door. Leaving Billina to wait, the two strangely matched companions crept silently out into the hallway and tiptoed back down the winding stairs.

Jack pushed open the mirrored door at the foot of the steps. His incongruously smiling face peered cautiously into the mirror-walled chamber beyond. Dorothy moved forward beside him. Tik-Tok still stood exactly where he had come to a stop when his motion ran down; his rotund image was reflected dimly over and over again in the walls of the room.

"Is that Tik-Tok?" Jack asked, rather loudly. While they were waiting for Mombi to fall asleep, Dorothy had spent the time telling him how she and Billina had come to Oz, and why.

Dorothy nodded in reply, hoping Jack would follow her example and keep quiet.

"There are more of him than I thought," Jack murmured, looking in confusion from reflection to reflection.

Dorothy glanced at him, and sighed. She looked toward the throne where she had first seen Mombi; for a moment she tried to imagine the Scarecrow there, in his rightful place. But it was empty now, for better or worse. The mandolin sat propped against the velvet seat cushions, and Dorothy's lunch pail lay on its side on the floor. Dorothy felt a twinge of disappointment and irritation as she looked at the wax-paper strewn about on the mirrored floor. By now she was very hungry, and she was sure Mombi must have enough to eat without stealing someone's lunch.

There was no sound from the room beyond, where Dorothy knew the witch must be sleeping. The barred gate at the entrance to the throne room was still firmly closed. Dorothy took a deep breath, and led Jack cautiously out across the shadowy silver floor toward Tik-

Tok. Jack's wooden joints made an odd, squeaking clatter in the silence as he followed behind her.

"Dorothy?" he said suddenly. His voice echoed even more loudly than his squeaking joints.

Dorothy turned to him with a finger pressed against her lips.

His face grinned unchangingly, but his reedy voice was full of yearning and sounded surprisingly shy as he whispered, "May I call you Mom, even if it's not so?"

Dorothy looked up at him in surprise. She had never thought of herself as old enough to be a mother to anyone, except perhaps her dolls—certainly not someone as large as Jack. But for all his size, he was really far younger than she was, and much newer to the world. And she knew exactly how it felt to have lost a mother She nodded, with a small, hesitant smile; and for once she was sure that his enormous grin was completely heartfelt.

They tiptoed on across the chamber to the place where Tik-Tok stood motionless and helpless. Quickly Dorothy stepped behind him and began to wind up his action. "Tik-Tok," she whispered, "are you listening? Don't say anything. This is Jack."

Tik-Tok swiveled his head to gaze at Jack's tall, spindly figure. Together their heads turned to look at Dorothy. They looked back at each other again in silent speculation.

"Go upstairs with him," Dorothy continued to Tik-Tok, "and he will explain what you have to do."

Tik-Tok nodded soberly. He crossed the room to the throne and reclaimed the empty—but still sturdy—lunch pail. Then he followed Jack away up the stairs.

Dorothy stood where she was until they disappeared behind the mirrored door. She turned back again when they were safely out of sight, and started with cautious, resolute steps toward the door to Mombi's sleeping chamber.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, she caught sight of—*something* in the mirror. A blurred shimmering flickered there like moth wings, as if something were trapped on the other side of the glass. She turned with a small gasp to face the image—and found only her own reflection gazing back at her.

Dorothy stared curiously into the mirror, certain that a moment before her reflection there had been something more. But if there had been something else, it was gone now. Completely alone, she moved on to the door of Mombi's sleeping chamber. Pulling it open, she crept through into the witch's room.

Mombi was asleep in her circular, satin-bolstered bed; but all that

Dorothy could see of her was a mound of white and gold quilts, which rose and fell with every breath of the sleeper hidden beneath them. Winged figures that looked incongruously like angels kept watch from atop the pillars which surrounded the bed.

Dorothy slipped past the bed and into the next room as softly as a mouse, scarcely daring to breathe. Inside the dressing room, all the heads sat in their numbered, glass-fronted cabinets, peacefully asleep in the dim blue light. Dorothy couldn't help shuddering as she looked at them.

Taking a deep breath, she made her way to Cabinet 31. The mirrored door hid the cabinet's contents, showing her instead her own reflection once again. She lifted a hand to her neck, and swallowed the sudden, painful lump in her throat as she imagined her head sitting on its shelf, like all the others, for Mombi to wear as her own. They *had* to escape. Looking at the other heads, Dorothy had no doubt that Mombi would do just the dreadful things she had promised to each and every one of them.

Dorothy pulled carefully at the door of the cabinet. It didn't budge. She pulled harder, with no more success. It was locked! Her hands made fists with frustration. She turned, glancing back through the doorway toward Mombi's sleeping chamber, wondering where the witch would hide a key.

Then Dorothy remembered that Mombi had opened and locked each cabinet with a ruby key she wore around her wrist. She glanced back toward the sleeping chamber and saw Mombi's arm sticking out from under the mound of blankets, and tied around its wrist with a velvet ribbon was the ruby key!

Dorothy crept back to the crystal bed and kneeled down beside the sleeping figure. Reaching out, ever so slowly, until her fingers were only inches from the ruby key, she looked up once more at the pile of blankets, watching them rise and fall . . . rise and fall . . .

She held her breath again. With her heart pounding in her ears, she let her fingers close over the key and moved it gently, pulling the ribbon from Mombi's wrist, a fraction of an inch at a time. Little by little it slipped from the witch's bony wrist . . . across her palm . . . over her fingers . . . nearly off . . . nearly . . .

Mombi's hand suddenly jerked, wrenching itself away, tearing the key from Dorothy's grasp. The witch rolled over in her sleep, away from Dorothy, with a great surge of the covers and a heavy sigh.

Dorothy cringed, shutting her eyes. But the room was silent again, except for the witch's wheezing. Dorothy rose to her knees, peering across the sea of blankets. The key and its ribbon lay there on the satin covers. Dorothy snatched up the key and slipped quietly back

into the next room.

Meanwhile, up in the tower room, Jack, Tik-Tok, and Billina worked together, following Dorothy's instructions. Billina yanked a cord from the rotting curtains, as Jack and Tik-Tok pushed a dusty, gold-cushioned sofa, and then another one, to the center of the room, arranging them seat-to-seat. Using the curtain cord, Tik-Tok bound the two sofas together. Jack picked the animal head off the wall above the mantelpiece with his long arms, and carried it back to the sofas. Billina studied the green, antlered head, with its wide staring blue eyes, pink nose, and drooping camel lips. "What's that?" she asked skeptically.

"It's a gump," Tik-Tok explained, as if it were the most normal-looking thing imaginable. He waddled forward to help Jack tie the head to the curving wooden arms that formed one end of the sofa-body. A bizarre imitation of an animal was beginning to take shape in the middle of the room, an animal Dorothy hoped to bring to life with the Powder of Life. Chickens were not well suited to frowning, but Billina did her best. This whole project seemed as unlikely to her as the Gump itself.

Jack picked up the broom that Tik-Tok had found in a closet and looked down at the sofa uncertainly. Dorothy had instructed them to build a creature as lifelike as possible, out of whatever pieces they could find in the room. If she could get the Powder of Life from Mombi's cabinet, they could all escape. The only thing that this animal had to be able to do—besides carry them all—was fly to the Nome King's mountain. Jack, made from odd pieces himself, felt a peculiar sense of responsibility for this new creation. Surely a proper beast of burden would want a tail, so it could tell one end from the other. He tied the broom neatly where he felt the sofa-creature's tail should be.

Tik-Tok came bustling back with his arms full of fronds from the royal palm, which Dorothy had told them to use for wings.

Jack looked up, taking hold of another curtain cord, as Tik-Tok came toward him again.

"Ex-cel-lent!" Tik-Tok said briskly. "Now we must Gump the head in the front and tie Jack's feet together."

Jack leaned over again, nonplussed but obliging, and began to wind the cord around his legs. Billina watched him tie himself up with silent wonder.

"Now," Tik-Tok said, pointing across the room, "bring that mantelpiece to the desk and an-noint the palms."

Jack straightened up and took a step—and keeled over with a clatter. He looked up from his place on the floor; his head, in a jumble of limbs, still grinned haplessly. “What does ‘anoint’ mean, Tik-Tok?”

“That’s right, Jack, left or wrong!” Tik-Tok exclaimed, his voice taking on a raving note. “Little girls and pump-kin-heads make chick-ens fly the coop!” He waved his hands wildly, looking like someone in the throes of utter confusion. The palm fronds flew in all directions across the room. “*—??” he cried, “∂∂∂∂!”

Billina and Jack gazed at each other in horrified incomprehension. Tik-Tok had gone mad.

CHAPTER 13

Dorothy pushed the ruby key into the lock of Cabinet 31, staring into the anxious eyes of her own reflection. She turned the key slowly—and suddenly heard a loud *click* in the silence.

Biting her lip, Dorothy pulled open the door. She gasped in sudden surprise and horror as she came face to face with yet another head. This one, however, was not perched delicately on a golden pedestal like all the others. It had been thrown roughly in a corner of the cabinet, and lay there asleep, jumbled in with a horrible assortment of charms and spells, monkey skulls, dried spiders and other things Dorothy did not want even to imagine. It could only be Mombi's original head, the one she wore before she had collected the other thirty. It was much older than the rest, and its features were grim and pinched; the mouth, a narrow straight line, looked as if it had been sliced into position with a razor. Dorothy had to admit she understood why Mombi preferred no to wear it, and why she kept it hidden away like this.

On one side, at the edge of the crowded assortment, was a can about the size of a baking soda tin, sitting alone. It was labeled, in very clear letters:

POWDER OF LIFE

Dorothy glanced anxiously over her shoulder toward the bedroom. She saw nothing moving, and heard only loud snoring. Cautiously she put her hand into the cabinet, being careful to avoid the witch's head as she reached for the tin of powder. But as she touched the can, her nervous fingers bumped into the box behind it. The box tumbled forward, clattering on the shelf.

"Oh, no!" The protest burst from Dorothy's lips before she could stop it.

The evil head snapped awake. Its fierce black eyes glared wildly into Dorothy's stricken face. Twisting on the shelf, it snapped at her hand with yellowed teeth. But Dorothy snatched the box of powder from the cabinet with a desperate, lightning grab.

The head began to wail in maddened frustration, screaming her name, "Dorothy *Gaaaaalllle!*"

Dorothy stood frozen for a moment that seemed as long as forever at the sound coming from the disembodied head. Then she slammed

the door shut, cutting off her view of the screaming face.

But the wailing continued, as the thirty other heads awakened behind their glass doors, and began to sound the alarm. All of them were as treacherous as Mombi's own, under the spell of her enchantment.

Dorothy turned and ran from the room with the box clutched in her hands. The Princess's headless body sat up in bed as Dorothy ran back through the sleeping chamber. The body's hands fumbled for the ruby key, twisting futilely as it tried without eyes or ears to sense what was happening.

Dorothy skidded to a stop and looked back at the room full of heads, at the ruby key still in the lock of Cabinet 31. She ran back into the cabinet room, turned the key in the lock, and jerked it out of the keyhole. Mombi could still come after them, but at least she would have to do it without a head.

Dorothy fled back through the witch's bedroom, running for her life past the blindly groping body. The Princess went for her as if by instinct, arms flailing and hands grasping.

Dorothy ran on into the mirrored chamber, suddenly confronting her own ghostly figure fleeing toward her on every side, pursued by a headless monster wild with revenge. The wailing of the heads filled the room. Her thoughts whirled with panic at the dizzying merry-go-round of images. Then she ran out across the silvered floor and began to pull frantically at one mirror after another—but none was the right one.

Suddenly, behind a panel to her left, a blurred shimmering caught her eye—the same ghostly glimmer Dorothy had almost seen before. She ran to that mirror and pulled; it opened, revealing the spiraling stairs. She darted through the opening and bolted up the tower stairs until she reached the mahogany door.

She rushed breathlessly into the room, slamming the door behind her. "Mombi's awake!" she cried in warning. Leaning back against the closed door while she caught her breath, she searched the room for the creature she had expected to be waiting. Finally she saw it squatting, absurd and incomplete, in the center of the room—pieces still strewn over the floor around it. "It's not finished!" she cried, her eyes filling with dismay. She looked at Billina, who was flapping her useless wings in frustration.

"Tik-Tok went berserk!" Billina squawked accusingly.

Dorothy looked at Tik-Tok in confusion and surprise.

"*;;*(!---------...*∂∂∂∂∂∂∂ + = !!!/ / // / + + + +.)(00000)!!!!" Tik-Tok ranted, turning around and around in witless circles.

As he turned his back, Dorothy saw that Key Number 3 was no

longer turning beneath his arm. "His *brains* ran down!" She rushed to his side and began to wind the key, as quickly as her nervous fingers could turn it.

"Bristl-ing pin-whorls up !!! fl reppart miz *** ing!" Tik-Tok exclaimed.

Jack looked on in amazement, wringing his twig-fingered hands. "If his brains ran down, how could he talk?"

Dorothy glanced up at him, and kept winding. "It happens to people all the time, Jack. Tie the palm leaves onto the sofa! Quick! Billina, help him!"

"We need another cord!" Billina squawked, still fluttering around in a nervous dither.

"Well, hurry!" Dorothy cried. Billina began to flap her way toward the curtains. Dorothy finished winding Tik-Tok's key, and let it go. It began to whirr properly once again.

"Th-th-thank good-ness, Dorothy!" Tik-Tok swiveled his head to look at her, his mustache twitching. "I'm all right now!"

The wailing from downstairs suddenly grew louder. Dorothy and the others froze, as they realized that Mombi must have found her way into the room full of heads. Time was running out. "Stay here at the door and listen for Mombi," Dorothy ordered Tik-Tok. She ran over to the sofa-creature, pulled open the tin box, and sprinkled the twin sofas with the Powder of Life.

"Make sure you do the head," Jack said anxiously. "So it can see where it's going."

The magic powder glittered in the air like a field of stars, then settled onto the couches. As the powder settled, its light went out and seemed to disappear completely.

Jack finished tying the palm-frond wings to the Gump's sofa body, and stood back expectantly. But the sofa sat where it was, unmoving and unchanged.

"It's not working!" Dorothy cried in dismay.

Jack scratched his head. "There might have been some magic words . . ."

"What were they?" Dorothy cried. "Think! You've got to remember!"

"I wasn't alive then," Jack protested unhappily. "How can I remember?" But he rapped harder on his head, as if he could shake a memory loose. A hollow echo rattled out through his nose.

Tik-Tok opened the door a fraction and peered down the empty stairwell, listening to the wailing; he glanced back at them stoicly.

Meanwhile in the cabinet room down below, the headless witch had seized a chair and hurled it at Cabinet 31 in a spasm of frustration. The mirrored glass shattered into a thousand fragments. Reaching in through the shards of glass, she seized her own snarling head and fitted in onto her neck.

“Hurry, Dorothy!” Tik-Tok cried, as he heard the distant sound of glass breaking.

Billina hopped up onto the sofa’s back, peering at the tin box still clutched in Dorothy’s hands. There was fine print on its side. “Read the directions!” she cried, with the exasperation of a thousand mother hens before her.

Dorothy turned the box over hurriedly and studied the writing on its side. “Oh, I don’t know these words!”

“Read them anyway!” Jack said, not seeing what difference it made.

Dorothy wrapped her tongue around the strange sounds and began to read them as best she could: “Weaugh . . . Teaugh . . .”

Jack studied the Gump’s head for any change in its stuffed expression.

“. . . Peaugh!” Dorothy finished at last, and took a deep breath.

The Gump’s glazed blue eyes suddenly widened, and rolled from side to side. He gazed around the room with an expression of fixed bewilderment and astonishment. “Peaugh—?” he said incredulously.

“That’s it!” Jack shouted. The others burst into cheers and laughter.

The Gump’s palm frond wings changed from withered brown to fresh spring green in a shimmer of color. They began to move, stiffly at first, but then beating faster and faster, raising a cloud of dust. The Gump’s sofa body began to clatter and dance on the floor, in rhythm with the beating of its wings.

“She is com-ing!” Tik-Tok cried from the doorway.

Jack seized the Gump’s broomstick tail, trying to hold the panic-stricken creature down.

“Tik-Tok! Billina! Get in!” Dorothy called. She scrambled up and into the sofas’ wide seat, and Billina flew up to perch beside her.

Tik-Tok hurried away from the doorway, as quickly as his springy legs would carry him. But when he tried to climb up over the sofas’ back, his legs were too short, and his round copper body too heavy. Dorothy caught his hands and pulled with all her strength; but he was far heavier than she was. “Jack!” she cried.

Jack let go of the broom and hurried forward. The Gump slewed crazily, his wings still beating. Finally, the cord that held his sides

together began to come undone. Billina fluttered out of the Gump's seat and tugged at the loosening knot with her bill. Jack shoved Tik-Tok from behind, while Dorothy pulled frantically at his arms.

Tik-Tok's lunch pail flew from his grasp and landed with a *clang* on the floor. "My lunch pail!" he shouted, in helpless protest, as the wash from the Gump's wings sent it spinning and clattering away across the floor. With a great heave, Dorothy and Jack rolled Tik-Tok as if he were a barrel up into the Gump's seat. Jack ran back across the room to fetch the pail.

"Billina!" Dorothy cried, reaching after the hen over the side of the couch. Billina ignored her, still wrestling to tighten the cord.

Jack caught up with the tumbling lunch pail and bent double to pick it up. A sudden noise made him raise his head as his hands closed over it. Looming above him in the doorway stood the furious figure of Mombi, her face contorted with rage. "So," she bellowed in righteous fury.

"Jack!" Dorothy screamed.

Jack dropped the lunch pail and ran for his life. But even as Jack dashed toward the sofa, the Gump twisted his head and saw Mombi. Confused and terrified, the Gump still had the instincts of a wild creature, and he knew Mombi for an enemy. Beating his wings even more madly, he began to bounce his ungainly new body across the room and away from her. A whirlwind of air swirled up around him, knocking over chairs and tables, raising dust in clouds. Dorothy coughed and sneezed, covering her nose with her hands. The French windows burst open, revealing the night sky between billowing curtains, and the Gump charged toward it.

Mombi forced her way through the storm of dust, her silken, embroidered nightgown flapping like the wings of a great bat as she fought her way toward them with maniacal determination.

Jack flung himself forward just as the Gump reached the windows. With a frantic leap, he grabbed hold of the Gump's broomstick tail, and hung on for dear life.

The Gump teetered on the brink of the window ledge, high above the ground. He had not been a winged creature in his former life, and the view downward was terrifying. "Fly! Fly!" Dorothy cried. His absurd wings beat furiously, blowing a curtain back into Mombi's face as she struggled toward them. She wrestled with it, shouting her rage, but it wrapped itself around her like a snake.

Abruptly the Gump plunged through the balustrade and off of the ledge, into the air. He plummeted toward the ruins, flapping his leafy wings desperately, like a fledgling sparrow falling out of a tree. Dorothy and the other passengers clung to his sofa-back, numb with

terror.

At the last possible moment, the Gump pulled out of his dive and began to soar upward and away—directly toward an enormous wall of stone. Now his passengers found the breath to scream, huddling down and shutting their eyes if they could. Again at the last second, with a furious effort, the Gump gained the extra bit of height he needed to clear the wall, avoiding total disaster by bare inches. He soared upward toward the sky, gaining more and more altitude, until he was winging his way confidently over the ruins of the Emerald City.

Mombi wrestled her way clear of the curtains, gasping with fury. She looked out of the window—barely in time to see her captives flying away over the ruins toward freedom. She shrieked in rage, shaking her fists with frustration. They had escaped! And they were heading toward the Nome King's mountain. If she couldn't find some way to stop them, she would have to tell him—before he found out for himself.

CHAPTER 14

As Dorothy recovered from her dizzying fright and looked around her, she realized with a pang that someone was missing from the Gump's back—Jack.

"Help!" a voice cried from somewhere down below. Dorothy and the others leaned out together over the back of the sofa. Dorothy gasped as she saw Jack still dangling helplessly from the Gump's broomstick tail. His fingers began to slide, losing their grip, as she watched.

"Tik-Tok!" she called. "Help me!" They leaned out and over together, and dragged Jack's flailing, windblown body upward. He landed on the seat in a rattling jumble, with a great wheeze of relief.

Behind them they heard Mombi still screaming in fury from the palace window. She slammed the windows shut as they watched; they heard the glass panes shatter. Her raving silhouette grew smaller and smaller, until at last it was lost from sight.

Dorothy sat back in the Gump's seat with a tremulous sigh of relief. She looked up into the starry sky in wonder, feeling the wind against her face. They were free, and they were really flying! Her magic had worked, and she had new friends to help her. At that moment, she felt as if finding the Nome King and saving Oz were no longer merely hopeless dreams, but marvelous certainties. She took Mombi's ruby key from her pocket and flung it over the side, letting it fall away into the night to be lost forever. Billina stood on the seat back beside her, with a proud ruffling of wings.

"If you ask me," a voice muttered, "this is most unusual."

Jack who had just finished untangling himself, turned to Tik-Tok. "It certainly is," he said.

Tik-Tok shook his head. "I didn't say anything."

"No, it's the Gump!" Billina cackled, leaping up in surprise.

The Gump swung his head around, trying with great difficulty to look back at his new body, and its passengers. "The last thing I remember is walking through the forest and hearing a loud noise," he said. "And now here I am, flying through the air. What am I, anyway?"

Dorothy felt a strange mixture of dismay and confusion fill her. She had brought this creature to life without any thought about the consequences. Now it was asking her questions, and she wasn't certain how to answer them. "You're just a . . . a . . . *thing* . . . with a gump's

head on it. We built you and brought you to life to take us to the Nome King and to rescue the Scarecrow."

The Gump was silent for a moment, as if he were taking it all in. "I may not last very long," he said at last, rather gloomily. "I don't feel too well put together."

Jack peered down over the Gump's side into the darkness. "Don't say that!"

Billina looked over and down beside him. "How do we know when to land? It's all so dark down there."

"The Nome King's mountain was straight ahead . . . I think," Dorothy said, suddenly uncertain about that, too.

"How fast are we go-ing, any-way?" Tik-Tok asked.

The group of friends suddenly fell silent. They looked at each other uneasily, as their new predicament began to dawn on them. Dorothy thought unhappily that things were at least as complicated in Oz as they were in Kansas. The Gump flew on into the night without further comment.

As the Gump grew small in the distance, Mombi burst from her palace gates, her robes streaming. She ran toward the nearest band of Wheelers, who lay curled up like hounds, sleeping in a tangled mass at the base of a broken pillar.

Mombi kicked them awake with vicious spite, her fury doubling as she saw them lying peacefully asleep when her very life was at stake—when they should have been alert and on guard for a disaster like this.

The Wheelers woke, whining in pitiful confusion, their red-ringed eyes wild and staring. Mombi pointed at the Gump, now barely more than a speck silhouetted against the full moon. *"Follow them!"* she screeched. *"Bring them back!"*

The Wheelers leaped to their wheels and bolted away in pursuit. Their eerie, yelping cries filled the empty streets of the Emerald City as they disappeared into the night.

"And don't come back without them!" Mombi howled.

Dorothy lay back in the Gump's seat, watching the moon and the stars, bright and unchanging above them. It was like the sky she knew at home—and yet it was different, in ways she could not quite describe. Somehow the stars seemed closer here, brighter, more like diamonds. The silence of the night was broken only by the swishing beat of the Gump's wings, and Dorothy found herself yawning. Beilina

had already settled down in her lap and was trying to sleep.

"I have been think-ing, and it seems to me that the on-ly thing to do is to keep fly-ing until dawn," Tik-Tok said. "May-be then we can find a safe place to land."

"Can you keep flying straight?" Jack called to the Gump.

"I don't think I could turn if I wanted to," the Gump remarked, his voice as doleful as before.

"Why don't we just go back to Kansas?" Billina mumbled as she tucked her head beneath her wing.

Dorothy curled up in a corner of the sofa seat, and sighed. "Well, whatever happens," she said, her voice fading, "I'm awfully sleepy right now—and just glad that I have my own head to be sleepy with."

Jack leaned forward and patted her shoulder with a twiggy hand. "If you want to sleep, I'll be glad to watch over all of you. I never need to rest, since I am not made of flesh."

Tik-Tok stiffened as he saw Jack leaning protectively over Dorothy. "I am not e-ven a-live," Tik-Tok said, a bit defensively. "So I need to rest less than you. I can watch over her."

"But your clockwork can run down." Jack straightened up and looked back at him, his grin belying the tone of his voice. He put his hands on his hips. "That seems like sleep, to me."

Tik-Tok's mustache bristled. "I'm completely wound up." His own voice rose, "Besides a pumpkin—"

"Quiet!" Billina crowed, at the top of her lungs.

Jack and Tik-Tok obeyed, looking sheepishly at Dorothy, then back at each other. They settled back, to begin their respective unblinking vigils. Billina tucked her head beneath her wing again, settling more comfortably in Dorothy's lap, as the girl snuggled down beside her.

Jack stole one more nervous glance over the sofa's back. Far below the Wheelers still trailed them; the baying hunters seemed to have no trouble keeping up with the Gump's lumbering flight. Jack looked back again at Dorothy, and suddenly his helpless smile seemed genuine once more. "Good night, Mom," he whispered.

Dorothy smiled too. "Good night, Jack," she murmured, drifting away on a tide of sleep.

As Dorothy slept and the Gump flew on through the night, Mombi sat on her golden throne, all alone in the silent palace, moodily plucking her mandolin. She could not sleep, knowing that Dorothy Gale and her chicken had outwitted *her* and escaped. They were heading for the Nome King's mountain—and if the Wheelers didn't stop them, her position as ruler of the Emerald City, and her own head, would be no

more secure than the heads she kept locked in her cabinets. The Wheelers *must* stop them! Even if the Emerald City was an empty ruin, it was *her* ruin. And in her palace she had everything she had ever wanted—even beauty. She had spent her whole life trying to reach this position of absolute luxury and power—and she was not going to let a little girl and a chicken ruin it all!

Mombi glanced up, as a shimmering wraith, like a half-seen reflection, fluttered mothlike behind the glass of a mirrored wall. She paused in her playing, to watch it with the narrow-eyed interest of a jailer. "Ozma . . ." she purred, spitefully. The figure danced in wordless desperation at the sound of Mombi's voice. "No one's going to help you . . . No one knows where you are," she taunted, plucking a dismal chord on her mandolin. "There's no one left who even knows *who* you are . . ."

The Gump flew on through the night, his wings beating tirelessly. But although his progress was steady, it was also slow. The Wheelers had long since caught up with him, seemingly just as tireless as he was. Only Dorothy, asleep with Billina nestled peacefully in her lap, did not hear them baying their frustration, though the endless squealing of their wheels echoed dimly in her dreams. Flecks of foam flew from their panting mouths as they raced on, their wild eyes always gazing skyward.

Jack peered down over the side of the Gump's seat again. "Can't you go any faster?" he asked anxiously.

The Gump strained his flimsy wings, trying for more speed. "Not . . . unless . . . one of you . . . wants . . . to jump . . . off . . ." he gasped.

Jack glanced around at the others, his vacant eyes thoughtful. "Tik-Tok, you're the heaviest," he said helpfully.

Tik-Tok's mustache bristled with indignation. He did not bother to dignify the suggestion with a comment. The Wheelers' howling cries grew even louder below; they seemed to realize that their quarry could not outfly them.

The Gump gazed steadily ahead, his jaw set. Below him now he suddenly saw the end of the vast forest over which they had been flying—and beyond it, gleaming like silver in the moonlight, a vast, empty plain: the Deadly Desert. For the first time, the Gump smiled.

The Wheelers, charging along below, saw only the Gump silhouetted against a field of stars. Screeching and baying, they rushed headlong toward their doom.

Abruptly the forest came to an end. Completely unprepared, the first of the Wheelers spilled out onto the sand, driven on by the ones

behind them, and unable to stop themselves in time. Their bloodcurdling cries turned to shrieks of terror as their wheels ground to a stop, trapping them in the sea of powdery sand. In another horrible instant they were gone, turned to dust—now one with the great, implacable ocean of nothingness.

Only a few fortunate Wheelers at the back of the pack had been able to stop in time. The lead Wheeler was among the stunned survivors. He shook his wheels at the sky in useless fury, as the supposedly easy quarry, who had already humiliated him once, flew on toward freedom—leaving him to Mombi's wrath.

Jack and Tik-Tok looked out and down as the Wheelers' cries faded unexpectedly behind them. "We're over the Deadly Desert," Tik-Tok announced. They looked up at each other, their expressions as unchanging as always. Then they glanced together at Dorothy and Billina, curled up against the chill night air, still innocently asleep. Tik-Tok's emerald eyes seemed to brighten and glow with a very real tenderness as he gazed at the sleeping little girl. Jack moved to her side, and took off his skimpy pink jacket. He laid it gently across her to warm her, his smile as wide as ever.

The two friendly rivals settled back into their seats again, listening to the rhythmic beating of the Gump's wings. For the moment, at least, they were content to share their self-appointed duty as Dorothy's guardians and helpers, secure in the knowledge that a little girl's love was quite large enough to embrace them both, and her courage great enough to save all of Oz as well. They leaned back, comfortable at last . . . neither one of them noticing, or even suspecting, that the single cord which held the Gump's makeshift body together had begun to fray. The Gump flew on toward morning, as unaware of the impending disaster as his passengers.

CHAPTER 15

Dorothy woke with a start as she was thrown backward in the Gump's seat. Her first confused impressions were of a world brightening with the gray light of dawn, and Billina squawking frantically in her ears.

"Dorothy! Wake up!" Jack shouted, somewhere out of her view.

The sofa tilted wildly in the other direction, and Dorothy clung to its back to keep from falling forward. "What's happening?" she cried. Looking over her shoulder she saw Tik-Tok clinging to the two ends of the broken curtain cord, holding the Gump's sofa body together with his stubby strength alone. "The cord broke!" he said grimly.

"I *knew* we needed another one!" Billina shook her head in flustered dismay. Having been proved right was small comfort, under the circumstances.

Dorothy looked around her, shaking her own head, trying to collect her thoughts. The Gump was flying through thick fog. The air around them was the same pearly gray color wherever she looked; she had no idea at all of where they could be.

Suddenly the Gump gave a terrible shudder and plunged forward. *"Other side!"* he bellowed desperately. *"Other* side!"

"I'll get it!" Jack flung himself toward the other side of the sofa, where the cord was fraying and unraveling in a second place. He hung over the edge and grabbed the two splitting ends just as they snapped apart. "Help!" he cried, his body dangling over the sofa's back. His voice suddenly seemed strangely muted.

Dorothy scrambled back to his side, and peered down. She blinked in disbelief as she saw nothing at all beyond his shoulders but the pointed end of a stick. His head, which had never been firmly fixed onto his body, had fallen off. Looking further over and down, she saw the unmistakable bright orange globe far below. Dimly she heard him still calling, "H . . . E . . . L . . . P . . ."

Dorothy pushed away from the sofa's back, and called frantically to the Gump, "Quick! Fly down! Jack's lost his head over the side!" Looking over and down again she shouted, "We'll save you, Jack!"

"I wasn't *made* to make turns!" the Gump snorted, still peevish about his ignominious new state.

"Try!" Dorothy cried out in anguish. "You've got to!"

The Gump looked back at her with a rolling blue eye. "Well, all right," he muttered, softening at the sight of her face. "Hold on. I'm

not sure I know how to do this." Straining mightily, the Gump stretched his neck and twisted his fragile palm fronds. His sofa body veered to the right and downward, his wings streaming behind. Dorothy clung to his cushioned back for dear life, while Tik-Tok and Jack's body valiantly held their positions, holding the cord ends that kept the Gump's body and soul together. Billina dug her claws deeply into the upholstery as she was buffeted by the wind.

Slowly, inch by inch, the spiraling Gump gained on Jack's tumbling head, until at last they were plummeting earthward side by side.

"Jack," Dorothy called, "can you hear me?"

"I . . . feel . . . awfully . . . diz . . . zzy . . ." the pumpkinhead called back, his game grin flashing in and out of view as he turned over and over.

Dorothy stretched out her arm, reaching for his head, her other hand clenched on the back of the seat. But the pumpkin spun in the air, still inches beyond her grasp.

Tik-Tok looked over his shoulder, analyzing the situation at a glance. "If we can get underneath him," he told the Gump, "we can catch him before he hits the ground and be-comes a squash."

Dorothy pushed recklessly outward as the image of Jack turned to pie-filling filled her mind. She would save him . . . *she would!* Her other hand slipped abruptly from the sofa back, and she lunged forward into space, throwing her arms around Jack's head.

"Look out, Mom!" the pumpkinhead cried. As if by remote control, Jack's headless body thrust out an awkward arm. Catching hold of Dorothy's waist just in time, it pulled her back aboard the sofa.

But Jack had no free hands—to save Dorothy, he had let go of one end of the broken cord.

"I'm coming apart!" the Gump groaned.

Billina leaped into the air, fluttering her stumpy wings. "Abandon *ship!"* she shrieked, as the sofas parted beneath them. The Gump's disintegrating body began to fall, piecemeal, out from under them. Abruptly they were all falling, separately but together—Tik-Tok with arms flailing; Billina, still flapping; Jack's headless body; Jack's head, slipping out of Dorothy's small arms; and Dorothy. She tumbled dizzily through the fog, her red-striped dress billowing around her.

Jack's hollow, grinning head gazed up at her. "I'm sorry, Mom," he said forlornly.

Dorothy shook her head, her braids flying. "That's all right, Jack," she called, unable to think of anything more encouraging. "It can't be helped." Somehow she heard an echo of her Aunt Em's words in her own. She knew that if she had another chance, she would still have

done everything the same way, and made the same choices. But she had never thought it would end like this. She closed her eyes, her heart beating wildly, and waited.

Far below, she heard a great *thump,* as something struck the ground. All at once she slammed down on top of the thing, with an impact that knocked the breath out of her body and rattled her teeth. Blinking and gasping, she found, to her astonishment, that she was sitting again on a padded seat. She had landed, mercifully, on top of one of the fallen sofas. She gazed around her in astonishment as her terror faded. She was perched among rocks and snow on a narrow mountain ledge.

Suddenly Billina fluttered down out of the clouds, like a featherduster without a handle. She landed at Dorothy's side with a *plop,* rose awkwardly to her feet, and shook herself out. The Gump's broomstick tail spun past them, still falling, on its way further down the mountainside. Another *thump* spun them around, and they found Jack—or his body—sitting unexpectedly in a snowbank. *"Braak!"* Billina leaped back with a squawk of fright, her feathers standing on end, as his head followed a heartbeat later. It landed, with great precision and good fortune, squarely upon his pointed neck; its face was turned away from them.

Dorothy pushed herself up from the sofa and ran to Jack's side. "Jack, are you all right?"

There was no answer, for a moment. Then Jack mumbled, "I'm all *wrong,* somehow."

Dorothy circled him until she could see his face. His grin frowned at her from above his eyes. "Your head is on upside down!" she said, the words bursting out of her at the unexpectedness of the sight.

"Well," Jack said, a bit huffily, "it seems to me that *you* are upside down instead, along with everything else in this strange country."

Dorothy glanced up into the clouds, with a fleeting thought that he might possibly be right—and the sudden realization that someone was still missing. A solitary palm frond drifted past, twisting and gliding like a fallen leaf. It missed the ledge and fell on down, down . . .

Bong! Bong! The echo of metal on stone reverberated through the fog. Dorothy looked up, and down again, in confusion.

"Dorothy! Dorothy!" Tik-Tok's unmistakable voice called to her suddenly from below.

Dorothy crept to the lip of the ledge and peered over. She gasped. Just below her, Tik-Tok dangled, clinging with one copper hand to the blackened skeleton of a long-dead bush. With his other hand he held the Gump's head by one mossy antler. One sofa was still attached to the Gump by a piece of cord. Below them, the abyss seemed to drop away forever, a dizzying well of fog edged by grim fangs of rock.

Billina and Jack pushed forward on either side of her, looking down.

"What are you doing up there, Tik-Tok?" Jack asked, in a nonplussed tone.

"Not funny, Pumpkin-head," Tik-Tok grated. A random falling bit of rock glanced from his helmet with a ringing *bong,* denting it.

"Hold on, Tik-Tok!" Dorothy called. She lay flat on her stomach in the snow, reaching down to him; but like Jack's head, he was just beyond her reach. She strained further.

"The scenic effect from up here is marvelous," the Gump remarked. Dorothy was not sure whether he was being philosophical or merely sarcastic. Bits of stone rained down on his antlers and Tik-Tok's helmet, as the skeletal bush began to pull loose from its niche in the cliff face. Another rock *bonged* off of Tik-Tok's back. Jack, clinging to his own head with one hand, lay down alongside Dorothy and reached out as far as he could with the other. His longer arm could almost . . . just . . . barely reach the copper man's wrist. His three spindly fingers closed around Tik-Tok's hand.

The deteriorating cliff crumbled more around the dead bush's roots. A hail of small stones and rocks began to fall on the helpless metal soldier, making him ring like a gong. Dorothy grabbed hold of Jack's waist, trying to drag them all back onto the safety of the ledge. But the combined weight was too much for her, even with Billina fluttering above, pulling at Jack's collar with all her strength.

"The so-fa!" Tik-Tok gasped. "It's too heavy!"

Billina flew down over the side of the cliff and landed on the sofa's arm. She began to peck fiercely at the cord which still bound the sofa to the Gump's head. The cord began to unravel and fray; with a final peck she severed it completely. The cord snapped apart, and the ornate sofa tumbled away into the chasm.

The recoil from the abrupt loss of weight catapulted the entire desperately struggling group back onto the safety of the ledge. They landed together in a sprawling heap of arms and legs, breathless with astonishment. For a long moment, no one even spoke. Then Dorothy untangled herself slowly and looked around. Jack lay folded up like a penknife beside her, missing an arm, and still wearing his head upside down. Tik-Tok lay on his back, badly dented but whole. The Gump, now merely a head again, lay on his side in the snow.

"That was a novel experience," the Gump said blandly, speaking for them all in something of an understatement.

The rest of the exhausted band began to pick themselves up and look about at their surroundings. The frightful magnificence of the scene that greeted them kept them silent for another long moment.

The dark, arrogant face of the Nome King's mountain seemed to rise straight up for miles above them, its grim rocky slopes covered with treacherous snow and ice. Far away on the horizon, they could catch brief glimpses of the Deadly Desert through the rising fog. And below them a sheer inaccessible cliff fell away for hundreds of feet into the gray sea of clouds. A chill wind wrapped its icy arms around them as they got to their feet, and Dorothy began to shiver with cold. "The Nome King's mountain . . ." she murmured, and the words came out in a white cloud.

"It is curious how the sky is underneath the land in this part of the world," Jack remarked thoughtfully.

Dorothy turned to him, remembering suddenly that his head was still on upside down, and he was still unable to recognize the fact. "Jack," she said wearily, "come here and let me put your head right side up." She held out her hands.

Billina scratched at the snow with one chilly foot, eyeing the rock beneath it. "Didn't the Wheeler say something about the Nome King not liking chickens?" she asked, a bit querulously.

Dorothy glanced back at the hen as she pulled Jack's head from his neck. "Oh, yes!" She nodded, remembering that Billina might be in the most danger of all. They had to find some way to protect her. "What should we do with Billina?" She looked down at the pumpkinhead in her hands, searching for inspiration, as the hen huddled nervously between her ankles.

And far below her feet, in the satanic glow of the mountain's hollow core, a deep voice stirred and grumbled somewhere in the sulphurous bowels of a hidden kingdom. An anxious face formed itself hastily from the stone of a nearby wall, and called out, "Yes, your Majesty? You called?"

"What is that . . . noise . . . up there?" the Voice rumbled.

The face froze. "I . . . don't know, your Majesty," it murmured, taken aback.

"Well, FIND OUT!" the Voice roared.

The face flowed back into the heart of the rock, and was gone.

Back on the mountainside, Jack grinned contentedly, rearranged as his original creator had intended, with both arms and his head on straight. This strange land no longer looked quite so alien, much to his relief. Dorothy stood back as she finished attaching his arm and glanced around at the others. One member of their company had disappeared—Billina. Dorothy smiled in satisfaction, not noticing the ominous features which slowly began to form in the rock wall behind

her. The stone-faced spy studied the group of intruders with silent suspicion.

"What about the Gump?" Tik-Tok said. "Most of him is gone."

"Good riddance!" the Gump exclaimed feelingly. "I am much happier just being a head, thank you." Even to be completely bodiless was preferable to being absurd, when he remembered his former life as a graceful creature of the forests.

Dorothy looked at him with concern. "I think we should put him back on the sofa. Then at least he could walk."

"No!" the Gump cried, horrified.

The stone face disappeared as silently as it had come, having seen enough.

"Every head must have a body to go with it if it ex-pects to get around." Tik-Tok lectured the Gump's head with military briskness. There was no room for vanity in this campaign, as far as he was concerned.

"It doesn't look like there's much of anyplace to get around to," the Gump answered sullenly, rolling his blue eyes from side to side.

Deep in the stone beneath them, the face reformed in a hidden chamber once again, its features contorted with anxiety. It gave its report in a hoarse whisper, as if it wished it did not have to speak the words at all. ". . . she escaped from Mombi somehow and crossed the Deadly Desert. Now she is on our mountain with a small army."

"She is more powerful than I thought," the Voice muttered darkly. "What about the . . . chicken?"

"There is no sign of the chicken," the spy said, relieved to have some good news to report.

"At least Mombi did something right," the Voice added.

"Should we take care of them with an avalanche?" the spy asked, eagerness coming back into its features.

The presence behind the Voice shifted in the smoky darkness, and suddenly a face grew clear. A gigantic figure wearing regal robes and the heavy golden crown of a king emerged from the gem-bright solid rock of the floor, his bearded face thoughtful. At first glance, his face might have been taken for kindly and benign. But the eyes brooding beneath heavy brows flashed with an almost sensual cruelty as he pondered the possibilities of this new situation. His robes glinted in the light as he turned—like everything and everyone else in his kingdom, everything about him was made of stone. Veins of gold glittered as he moved, edging collar and sleeve, tracing the uncanny brittle flow of his clothing like ever-changing patterns of brocade.

“No . . . no . . .” the Nome King said at last, puffing on his pipe, “this might be amusing, after all.”

CHAPTER 16

Dorothy and Tik-Tok finished reattaching the complaining Gump to the remaining sofa, firmly knotting what was left of the curtain cord. Jack stood by, gazing at the hole which had been punctured in his carved hat. It looked much like a third eye. He poked a long, crooked finger through the hole speculatively, and looked up again as the Gump stamped his newly reanimated feet in outrage.

"This is terrible!" the Gump complained loudly. "Suppose I meet another Gump. I'd die a second time of embarrassment."

And behind him, another face materialized in the wall of the cliff—the face of the Nome King himself. The King studied the preposterous handful of misfits who had come to challenge his mighty kingdom, and barely repressed a chuckle of evil amusement. He noted to himself, with a twinge of relief, that there really was no sign of a chicken.

"I don't think you have to worry about meeting any other Gumps up here," Dorothy said.

The Nome King cleared his throat and said, in a polite but earth-shaking tone, "Tell me who you are and why you have come all the way to my kingdom and what I can do to make you happy."

Dorothy and the others spun around together, then fell back in amazement, looking about them but seeing no one. The mighty voice echoed from the rocks and icy cliffs until it seemed to come from everywhere.

"It is the Nome King," Tik-Tok murmured to Dorothy.

Dorothy stepped forward, holding her shoulders straight, trying to hide her uncertainty and fright. She gazed directly at the stone wall, not knowing to whom she should be speaking, or where to look. "My name is Dorothy Gale, your Majesty. And these are my friends—Tik-Tok, Jack, and the Gump."

"Not *the* Dorothy Gale, from Kansas?" The Voice rumbled in mock astonishment. There was an impossible flicker of movement in the solid wall of rock before her, and suddenly Dorothy could see a face there, the way she had sometimes watched faces forming in the clouds on a summer sky. There was something frighteningly familiar about that face, in spite of its alienness, that made her think of Kansas, and strange machines, and a stormy night—

"Yes . . . your Majesty," she said, bobbing her head in what she

hoped was a respectful way. "We have come to ask you to release the Scarecrow from captivity and to restore the Emerald City."

The Nome King's shadowy eyes glittered with crystalline amusement at the innocent, childish faith in the words of the legendary Dorothy Gale. This *was* going to be amusing . . .

Jack, Tik-Tok, and the Gump looked on in silent amazement as Dorothy spoke to a face made of stone in the cliff wall before them. And, hidden inside Jack's hollow head, Billina peered out secretly through one of his eyes, listening along with the rest to all that occurred.

"You believe I have stolen something, Dorothy, and you want me to give it back?"

Dorothy bit her lip, unsure about accusing a king of being a thief. "Yes, your Majesty," she murmured.

"If someone steals something, you think the right thing is for them to give it back?"

"Yes, your Majesty," Dorothy said, more confidently.

The Nome King raised a stony eyebrow. "And what if they don't want to give it back?"

Dorothy hesitated again. "Then . . . we are here with our Army . . . to conquer you . . . and force you to give it back." She folded her arms, trying to look firm and resolute.

"Army?" The Nome King responded, mystified.

Tik-Tok stood forward in answer, coming to attention and saluting smartly.

The Nome King studied him, then suddenly began to chuckle. His chuckle turned to a laugh, the laughter grew, and he roared with it until he choked. Choking, he began to cough, and the cough turned to a spasm which shook the earth. The ledge on which they stood began to tremble. Abruptly the ground gave way beneath Dorothy, tipping her down and throwing her into the chasm which opened suddenly beneath her feet. With a scream of fright, she was sucked down into the mountain's heart before the horrified eyes of her helpless companions.

Dorothy fell down and down, tumbling and sliding, as the sky and the stunned faces of her friends grew small and disappeared above her. She fell with such speed, buffeted by the hard walls, that what she saw quickly lost all meaning for her dazzled mind. A kaleidoscope of images of the earth's inner workings flashed past her—dark stone and glittering jewels, fire and smoke, crackling static electricity, and the dimly seen moving forms of nightmarish living beings of rock.

She sank through the earth as if it were fluid. Dropping all at once

into a river of emeralds, she was swept along on their tide. Huge stone hands shifted and sorted the gleaming jewels around her, and gigantic stone faces grinned down at her. But none of the hands caught her own outstretched hands, or stopped her progress through the entrails of the earth. All around her now was the clang of metal, the deep creaking and groaning of rock, the sounds of the ongoing toil of an underground kingdom.

Suddenly the Nome King's voice reverberated around her, drowning out all other sounds as he shouted, "ALL THE METALS IN THE WORLD, AND ALL THE PRECIOUS STONES AS WELL, ARE MADE HERE, IN MY UNDERGROUND DOMINIONS . . ."

Dorothy watched as crystals of deep rainbow hues formed like magically blooming flowers ahead of her, and unformed again around her, to let her pass.

"ALL MADE BY NOMES, FOR MY AMUSEMENT . . . SO IMAGINE HOW I FEEL WHEN I FIND THAT SOMEONE—FROM THE WORLD ABOVE—HAS DUG DOWN AND FOUND MY SECRET HIDING PLACES AND REMOVED MY STORED TREASURES." His voice darkened with rage. "AS FOR THE EMERALDS IN THE EMERALD CITY . . . ALL THOSE EMERALDS REALLY BELONGED TO ME! I WAS JUST TAKING BACK WHAT WAS RIGHTFULLY MINE TO BEGIN WITH!"

Breathless, Dorothy tried to find the strength to reply. "You have so much," she gasped.

"BEG PARDON?" the Nome King bellowed.

"You have so much!" Dorothy shouted.

"THAT IS NOT THE POINT. THE POINT IS THAT I AM NOT THE THIEF. I AM AN HONEST MAN . . ."

Suddenly Dorothy cascaded over a great ledge, borne on the roaring river of emeralds, falling and falling again through a shower of sparkling jewels, twisting and turning in utter darkness until at last she was spewed out onto the floor of a vast cavern.

She slid across a wide expanse of polished obsidian, beneath a hemispherical vault studded with countless glittering crystals like the inside of an immense geode. She plowed to a halt as she collided with something large and soft, which rustled loudly as her impact drove it away across the slippery floor.

"YOUR FRIEND IS THE THIEF!" the Nome King finished at last.

Far across the cavern, the rustling thing came to a stop, its toplike spin slowing. Limbs and head disentangled themselves, and someone sat up, peering back at Dorothy as she blinked her eyes clear. She saw, with sudden incredulity, that the other person was the Scarecrow.

"Dorothy!" he exclaimed, in equal astonishment.

“Scarecrow!” she cried. A sudden crack of thunder drowned out her cry, and the crystalline lights dimmed. A blinding flare of blue-white lightning followed, and then utter darkness.

The lights brightened again, and Dorothy looked about her in confusion and fright. She was alone. The Scarecrow had disappeared. She whirled around and caught her breath. The Nome King was materializing from the stone of the wall behind her, a gigantic face that loomed over her like a great cresting wave, impassive and faintly amused.

“Where is the Scarecrow?” Dorothy demanded, her hands making fists to keep from trembling. “What happened to him?”

The Nome King’s mocking smile widened. “I transformed him into a beautiful and amusing ornament for my palace. I had been planning to do it for some time, and your coming here reminded me.”

Dorothy felt her heart fill up with grief and fury, at the knowledge that she had not saved the Scarecrow, but only caused him worse suffering. She ran to the wall and began to beat against the looming, indestructible being with her fists. *“He never stole the emeralds!”* she cried. *“The emeralds were already there when he arrived!”* She pounded futilely against the stone until her small hands were bruised and raw.

The Nome King’s hands of stone grasped her arms, restraining her with surprising gentleness. She looked up at him, her eyes brimming with tears of outrage; startled to see that he was no longer gigantic, but had shrunk down until he was barely larger than human-size. She began to sob, desperate and disoriented and very much alone. The King’s rough hand of stone caressed her hair, soothing her with an almost fatherly touch. “No . . . no . . . no . . . Things aren’t so bad,” he said softly.

Still sobbing helplessly, Dorothy protested, “The emeralds were . . . they . . . were already . . . when he . . .”

“No . . . no . . . don’t cry. Poor, poor Dorothy Gale from Kansas . . . I didn’t realize he meant so much to you . . .” The Nome King studied the small, sobbing creature held captive in his cold massive grip with dark fascination.

“They were already there . . . when . . . he became king . . . the emeralds . . . were . . .”

The Nome King looked down at her and smiled; but his smile was a twisted mockery of compassion. The innocence of a child, the ephemeral fragility of a living being, thrilled his pitiless, immortal mind—the awareness of her pure and unspoiled spirit tantalized his own evil soul. She was just exactly what he needed, to complete his plans . . .

“All is not lost, Dorothy,” he said again, darkly reassuring. “How

about a game, hmmm? I know just the thing to cheer you up. You and your friends . . .” he glanced up.

Abruptly, as if on cue, Tik-Tok, Jack, and the Gump spun down the chute and into the chamber. They came sliding across the floor to Dorothy’s feet together, as he let go of her arms.

“. . . you and your friends can play a little game, and I bet you get the Scarecrow back after all. You’d risk something for that, wouldn’t you?” He smiled again.

Dorothy wiped the tears from her face, taking a deep breath, as she turned to face her friends. The four companions looked at one another nervously, and back at the Nome King; but no one found the words to answer him.

CHAPTER 17

The surviving Wheelers made their way back to Mombi's castle, abject with failure and limping on tired wheels. Their dread at facing their mistress was matched only by their terror of her wrath if they did not return, for her evil magic could follow them anywhere in Oz.

Mombi appeared in a high window of her palace as she heard the sound of their squealing wheels. She stared down at them, seeing how few of them remained and that they had no prisoners with them. They had let Dorothy Gale and her ragtag friends escape. She ran down the stairs and through the palace, out into the square; she began to scream furious, outraged questions the moment the Wheelers came into view, barely stopping for breath, or even to hear their whining explanations. Their leader pointed back the way they had come, cringing as he blurted out his story. His voice trembled as he described the terrible fate of his companions in the Deadly Desert.

Completely unmoved by any pity, Mombi gazed in the direction of his pointing hand, seeing only that the Nome King's brooding mountain lay in that direction, beyond the desert's farthest edge. Dorothy Gale had been heading for that mountain, she was sure of it. That wretched little girl from Kansas might even reach it; and if she got that far, then the Nome King would surely know that Mombi had failed in her duty. As much as she hated the thought of facing the Nome King and warning him, it would be far worse if she let him find out for himself.

She screamed another command at the Wheelers, ordering them into her palace. The miserable creatures obeyed, stumbling over their wheels in their haste as she drove them down dark corridors and through subterranean cellars to a secret stairway hidden deep beneath the palace. The Wheelers wailed, hysterical with fright, as they saw the dark, endless tunnel that waited for them at the foot of the stairs. It was Mombi's secret pathway to the Nome King's realm, the last place on or under the earth that any of them wanted to see. Mombi would surely blame everything on them, and the Nome King's punishments were even more horrible than hers. Mombi flailed around her with her magician's staff, driving the panic-stricken Wheelers down into the tunnel ahead of her. She followed behind them, her rage fueled by a terror as great as any that her pathetic subjects felt, terror of a power far greater and more elemental than her own.

The Nome King was not even thinking of Mombi anymore, having a far greater interest in his new, unexpected guests than in the witch's futile explanations of how they had gotten this far. He gestured grandly from his place in the wall, as he explained the rules of his "game." Dorothy, Tik-Tok, and Jack, all sitting on the Gump, listened tensely to his words.

"One by one," he said, his deep voice full of deceptive reason, "you can go and inspect my ornament collection. Each of you has three chances to guess which one is the Scarecrow. If you touch the right object and say the word 'Oz' at the same time, the Scarecrow will be restored and may leave the palace. Sound fair enough?"

The four friends put their heads together, whispering, trying for at least a second of privacy in which to discuss their situation. The Nome King watched them with a cryptic smile, puffing on his pipe. "What else can we do?" Tik-Tok asked. "He is a very power-ful magician."

"We are lucky he has not turned us to stone," Jack pointed out, glancing nervously at the King and being horrified to find him looking back.

Dorothy took a deep breath and looked up at the Nome King with as much resolution as she could manage. "All right." She nodded. "We accept."

The Nome King took his pipe from his mouth. "Good," he said. "Why doesn't the sofa go first . . . ?"

The Gump bristled indignantly at the insensitive reference to his condition, but didn't quite dare to complain. Suddenly countless Nome hands formed in the face of the wall to the left of the King. They drew the stone up and apart into an arching doorway, as if it were no more solid than a curtain. The doorway, framed by fingers, revealed a passageway beyond and steps leading downward. The Gump looked toward it. "I haven't got any arms to touch with . . ." he protested, not even trying to explain that he was simply an innocent bystander.

"You can use your antlers," the Nome King answered easily, and gestured him toward the passageway. The Gump shuffled toward it with a sigh of resignation. The King looked at the others, folding his hands like a perfect host. "Shall we have some refreshment while we wait?"

Dorothy watched the Gump disappear, and the doorway of stone ooze down and close behind him. When she turned back, she found that stools had sprung into being for them to sit on while they waited for his return, along with a tray of refreshments. The stools were gigantic, perfect emeralds, and the refreshments looked even more remarkable—cups full of steaming liquid and large slices of some kind of marbelized pie. Since Dorothy was the only one in her group

capable of eating, she cautiously lifted a slice of pie from the plate—dubious about how it would taste, but too well brought-up to refuse. She took a bite and chewed thoughtfully; it had a pleasant, nutty texture.

“How is it?” Jack asked.

“Good,” Dorothy replied, rather surprised.

“What is it?” Jack whispered, leaning forward.

“Limestone pie . . . and hot melted silver,” said the King, who raised his cup and took a draught of the molten metal.

There was a sudden dull *boom* of what sounded like distant thunder. Dorothy, about to take a sip of silver herself, thought the better of it and placed her cup back on the table. Jack watched Dorothy chew the pie with great interest. “I’ve never eaten anything in my whole life,” he observed, finally.

“That’s too bad, Jack,” said Dorothy with her mouth still full. “Do you want to try some?” She broke off a piece of the pie, and before Jack could protest she placed it carefully inside his jagged mouth. As she did, she whispered carefully so as not to be overheard by the King, “Here’s something to eat, Billina. It’s limestone pie.” She glanced quickly to see if the King has noticed anything, but his head was tipped far back as he drank deeply from his cup.

There was another *boom* from far off somewhere, and Dorothy noticed that the King seemed pleased to hear it. Tik-Tok leaned closer, and murmured in Dorothy’s ear, “The King said some-thing about risk. What is it that we are risking?”

The loudest clap of thunder yet rolled over Dorothy and the others where they sat. The lights dimmed; then suddenly the chamber was filled by a blinding flash of brilliant blue, and plunged into darkness. After another moment, which seemed endless, the normal lighting returned. Dorothy lay sprawled on the floor where she had fallen, Tik-Tok and Jack beside her in a heap.

“What was that?” Jack gasped.

The Nome hands reappeared, pulling open the wall.

“Next!” the King called briskly.

The hands formed an arching doorway as before, but no one came out of the passageway beyond.

“Where is the Gump?” Dorothy asked.

The Nome King shrugged. “He’s turned into an ornament.”

Dorothy stared at him in shock and disbelief; noticing, dimly, that somehow the King looked more like a real person, and less like

something carved from stone. Part of the wall around him was beginning to form into a rough-hewn throne for him to sit in. "An ornament," he went on, when Dorothy still stared at him, "a knick-knack! He failed to guess correctly, so now he is part of my collection."

Jack's twiggy fingers flew to his face. "Oh, no!" he said.

"But that's not fair!" Dorothy protested.

The King shrugged again. "You said you were willing to take a risk. Well . . . it seems fair to me, and what I think is all that matters."

"But you didn't tell us about it!"

"You didn't ask!" The Nome King chuckled, drinking in her dismay like nectar. "Perhaps you'd prefer to visit my fiery furnace?" He gestured with his pipe. A cloud of flame and smoke belched into the room from somewhere in the seething depths of the earth; his three captives recoiled from the heat, coughing and choking. With another wave of the King's hand, the furnace disappeared . . . but the threat remained. "NEXT!" he cried. "Pumpkinhead!"

Dorothy stood frozen where she was, speechless with anguish. The King looked back at her, and a slow grin spread over his massive face. "I'll be generous. I'll only count the wrong guesses. You can keep on guessing as long as you guess right. That's fair, isn't it?"

Dorothy and Tik-Tok glanced at one another again, beyond speaking pointless words. Then Dorothy turned to Jack, who, smiling as always, sighed and climbed to his feet. "Being an ornament will probably be hardest on you, Dorothy," he said wistfully, "since you are used to eating and sleeping and other such activities. Since I never sleep or eat, I won't miss them."

"Don't talk like that, Jack," Dorothy said fiercely. "We won't become ornaments."

But Jack only looked at Tik-Tok. "Tik-Tok isn't even alive."

"I have al-ways valued my life-less-ness," Tik-Tok answered evenly.

Dorothy hugged Jack's frail body gently and whispered, "Be careful, Jack . . . you too, Billina."

Billina's eye peeped out of Jack's socket, looking back at her ruefully. "We're a long way from Kansas, Dorothy."

Dorothy nodded, biting her lip. She looked up at the looming walls of stone that held them prisoner, and thought that they were a long, long way from Kansas, indeed.

CHAPTER 18

“Faster! Faster!” Mombi rode through her underground passage astride the backs of her yelping Wheelers, her dark robes flapping behind her. At her command they had locked their wheels together and fused themselves into a living chariot to bear her along. The tunnel led underneath the deadly sands of the desert that lay above, and it would eventually end in the Nome Kingdom. It had been used by the nomes to bring all the emeralds back from the Emerald City, but Mombi had been forbidden to use it unless the matter was of utmost urgency. Now, seconds counted and the Wheelers could not travel fast enough to suit her. If the Nome King found out about that chicken before she was able to warn him . . . ! He had given her what was left of the Emerald City with only two requests: she should bring Dorothy Gale to him if the girl ever returned to Oz, and under no condition were chickens allowed to live anywhere in his dominions. She had failed on both counts, and the thought of what he might do made her strike out fiercely at the grotesque helmet-faces and unprotected backs indiscriminately, driving her infernal living chariot to even greater efforts of speed. “Faster!” The Wheelers howled with frenzy and fear.

Behind the impenetrable walls of her destination, Dorothy and Tik-Tok stood alone with the Nome King in his glittering throne room.

“I don’t hold out much hope for Jack,” Tik-Tok said quietly. “He has many ex-cel-lent qualities, but think-ing is not one of them.” He was experiencing some surprising regret now that Jack was gone, about the uncharitable thoughts he had harbored toward the Pumpkinman before. Jack had been a loyal and caring friend; he was hardly to blame for the fact that his head was so empty that a chicken could roost inside it.

“Maybe he’ll be lucky,” Dorothy murmured weakly, not even convincing herself.

A distant roll of thunder broke the silence. The Nome King fixed Dorothy with his gaze and held up two fingers. “Two guesses left . . .” Dorothy shuddered, and her heart sank. It was clear that each peal of thunder meant a wrong guess, and Jack now had only two chances remaining. Dorothy could hear her own heartbeat, and she looked back at Tik-Tok. Even his ticking seemed louder than usual. “Do you need winding?” she asked.

Tik-Tok considered for a moment, gently rocking back and forth on his springs. "My thinking could be tight-er," he said.

Dorothy stepped over to wind up her friend, her fingers numb with anticipation. "It's too bad they didn't make you so you could wind yourself up, Tik-Tok," she said, to cover her thoughts. "Half the trouble you get into comes from winding down." Her voice began to tremble as she looked up and saw the Nome King studying her with his penetrating crystal eyes.

Suddenly another *boom* of distant thunder sounded, and the King leaned forward and held up a solitary finger. *"One* guess left," he smiled. As Tik-Tok's head swiveled to look at her, Dorothy turned away slightly, so that he could not see the tears brimming in her eyes.

"I am a mere mach-ine, and there-fore must ac-cept the faults of my construction," he answered philosophically, "and do the best I can."

Suddenly another enormous crash of thunder rolled over them, filling the room. Blue light flared blindingly in the darkness that followed—more darkness; a darkness whose meaning they now understood too well.

The lights came on again. "NEXT!" the Nome King shouted triumphantly. "THE ARMY OF OZ!"

Dorothy threw her arms around Tik-Tok and hugged him with all her strength. He patted her shoulder gently with a copper hand.

"Good-bye, Do-ro-thy. Don't worry about me. I will think of a way to guess cor-rectly." He turned and walked toward the waiting passageway, with the same stalwart spring in his step. He glanced back as he reached the hand-held doorway, and Dorothy waved sadly. He passed through the arch of stone, and it slid closed again behind him.

Dorothy turned slowly to face the Nome King, now completely alone with him. His form had become almost entirely human, with Jack's disappearance. He sat smugly on his granite throne, quaffing the last of the liquid silver from his jewel-encrusted chalice. He set the cup down and studied her, musing.

Dorothy stared back at him, through a moment that seemed to last forever. It struck her that somehow, with every transformation that took place, he was stealing away something of their living spirits, and through this he was becoming more and more human in appearance. They had more to lose in this game than they had realized, and the Nome King had more to gain.

Then came the first distant roll of thunder.

And not so far away at all now, screeching wheels flashed in the

torchlight, Mombi's darkly glittering robe snapped in the wind, as she and her four-wheeled minions bored their way beneath the Deadly Desert toward the Nome King's mountain.

In his throne room, the Nome King pushed his hand into a hidden crevice of his robes. Casually he pulled a glowing coal from his pocket and dropped it into the bowl of his pipe. He puffed in satisfaction as a wreath of smoke rose up and began to curl about his head like a garland. After another long moment, he said at last, "Why did you come here?"

Dorothy frowned, pushing her lip out. "I told you why . . ."

The Nome King raised his eyebrows. "You came all this way for a Scarecrow?" he mused skeptically.

Dorothy nodded. She spun around, looking toward the invisible doorway, as another distant roll of thunder sounded. Tik-Tok had made a second wrong guess.

"Are you sure you didn't come back for these?"

Dorothy turned to face him again and stared in astonishment at the sight before her. The Nome King had lifted the hem of his robe, revealing newly formed feet of stone—and on them he wore a pair of ruby slippers, as incongruous on his massive body as a rose sprouting from a boulder.

"My ruby slippers!" Dorothy cried, stunned with disbelief. They were the slippers she had been given when she first visited Oz, that had held the magical power to grant any wish. But they had fallen from her feet somewhere during that star-spun, dizzying journey when she had wished herself back to Kansas. She had thought they had been lost forever. Now, when she so desperately longed to be able to wish herself away from here again, to see them on the feet of her captor was more dreadful than anything she could have imagined.

"No, no, no, not at all," the Nome King protested. *"My* ruby slippers. They just fell out of the sky one day. You were so anxious to get home." His mouth quirked.

Dorothy twisted a pigtail, feeling as if invisible hands were twisting her stomach the same way. She realized now why the Nome King wanted a human form—so that he could wear those slippers, and add their magic to his own, for his own wicked purposes.

The Nome King turned his ankle, admiring the slippers like a vain young girl in front of a shop mirror. "They are very powerful—they made it possible for me to conquer the Emerald City. Thank you . . ." He looked up again, watching Dorothy before him and savoring her anguish.

Dorothy looked around her desperately, for some escape from the room, or from the terrible grief that squeezed her heart. The tears that had been hovering in her eyes began to trickle out and down her cheeks. Because of her, her friends were being lost one by one. Was even the ruin of the Emerald City truly her fault?

A Nome servant appeared suddenly in the wall beside the King and whispered something into his ear. The King frowned, nodding, and waved a hand in dismissal. "Your Army has stopped guessing and is standing perfectly still in the middle of the room."

Dorothy glanced toward the place where Tik-Tok had disappeared, grateful for even that distraction. "His action must have wound down," she said, more to herself than to the King. "I wound up his thought but I forgot to do his action."

"Hmm." The Nome King rubbed his chin. "Why don't you go in and wind him up?" He smiled again. "Then you can stay in and guess for yourself." *When he fails.* The King did not have to add those words; Dorothy already knew what he must be thinking. He waved his hand again, and Nome hands reappeared to pull aside the wall.

Dorothy took a deep breath, pulling her courage together with all her strength. She rose slowly from her emerald stool and started toward the archway that led to the Nome King's ornament collection. The Nome King watched her go, studying her very human reactions with fascination, relishing her fear.

Dorothy reached the entrance and looked through it. Beyond the wall was darkness, and a steep flight of steps leading down, down . . .

"Dorothy . . ." the Nome King called.

She turned, looking back at him, her eyes wide and her fists clenched.

"You don't have to go down there . . ."

She stared at him in disbelief and utter confusion.

He smiled, the smile that seemed so reasonable, and hid so much. "I'll use the ruby slippers and send you home instead."

Dorothy's breath caught. She swallowed the lump in her throat, and said, "What about my friends?"

He shrugged. "Forget about them. You can't help them now. When you get back, you'll never think about Oz again."

Dorothy stared at the Nome King, at her ruby slippers on his feet.

"There's no place like home . . ." he said, looking up at her from beneath his heavy brows as if he could read her very thoughts.

Dorothy shuddered, as she suddenly realized how much more she would lose by giving in, by listening to his promises, than by going on. Turning her back on him, she walked through the curtain of rock

and started down the steps.

She did not see the Nome King lean back in his throne, puffing on his pipe, his smile even wider and more satisfied than before; secure in his knowledge that there was no way she could have won, no matter what course she had chosen.

As Dorothy reached the foot of the dark stone stairs, she heard the rumble of the stone curtain falling behind her, shutting her in with the King's ornaments. She stepped forward hesitantly into the lighted space that waited for her now, and gasped in wonder. The rooms before her were truly rooms that belonged in a palace. She felt as tiny and lost in their splendor as any one of the countless ornaments that lay displayed everywhere about her. The rooms were vast and high, their ceilings composed of vaulting arches, their walls and floors as smoothly molded as the furrowed fields of Kansas. Columns and pillared doorways rose on every side, supported by countless other hands of stone, leading her eyes toward still more chambers beyond; she could almost have forgotten that they were all underground—except that there were no windows anywhere. She tiptoed forward timidly, awestruck, feeling very much like a trespasser in the sepulchral beauty and stillness of the Nome King's ornament rooms.

"Tik-Tok!" she called and stopped, listening for an answer. She heard only the echo of her own voice, dancing eerily from room to room. She moved on again, her arms held close at her sides. On mantels, on shelves, on pedestals and tables, were clustered ornaments of every imaginable kind—clocks, vases, necklaces and rings; bowls, statuary, knick-knacks. They were made of an equally astonishing variety of materials—gold and cinnabar, crystal, porcelain, alabaster, agate—and everywhere there was always the wild light of precious gems glittering as she passed. All these beautiful objects, she realized, had been made from materials that had come out of the earth, the Nome King's domain. He had gathered them here, hoarding them like a miser, laying claim to their beauty even though he was neither their true creator nor their rightful owner.

Dorothy's heart sank as she went on through room after room; she wondered how she could ever even begin to guess which of these countless objects hid the true form of any of her friends. She searched another room for the only form she knew she would still recognize, calling again, "Tik-Tok!" Again, only echoes answered her.

Finally, on the verge of giving up hope, deeply lost in the endless maze of rooms, she saw Tik-Tok at last, standing as silent and motionless as one more statue, his arm outraised. Her heart filled with relief and joy at the sight of her one remaining friend in this terrifying and mysterious place.

She ran to his side and twisted first his Action key, and then his Speech key. They were both still tightly wound. Puzzled, she moved around to face him. “Why, Tik-Tok,” she burst out, “you’re all wound up! What’s the matter? Why did you stop?”

“Shh,” Tik-Tok murmured from beneath his mustache. “It was my way of get-ting you in here. Pre-tend that you are winding me up any-way . . . I have an i-dea that may save us.”

Dorothy moved obediently around to Tik-Tok’s back and pretended to wind his keys in case any of the Nome King’s spies should be watching them.

“I still have a chance,” Tik-Tok said softly, “and if I guess in-cor-rectly, you watch and see what I am changed in-to. That may give you a clue.”

Dorothy stared at him. “What a good idea!” she whispered.

Tik-Tok straightened his rotund body with a small, proud motion, and looked around him at the spread of objects on tabletop and mantel. He put out his hand again; it hovered over one ornament and then another, and Dorothy noticed that it seemed to tremble slightly. He pulled his hand in again; his head swiveled to look at her. “My steel brains must be damaged,” he muttered uncertainly, “because I am having dif-fi-culty guess-ing.”

Dorothy threw her arms around the copper man, hugging him to her heart. As she pulled back again, she saw an unexpected drop of oil running down his cheek from the corner of his eye. Gently she wiped away the droplet with the ribbon of her dress; it left a small wet mark on the satin. She looked into his shining emerald eyes for a long, silent moment, and they gazed back into her own. Even though the Nome King might steal a human form, he would always have a heart of stone, with no true feelings in it. But if Tik-Tok were not alive, looking back at her with such loyalty and love, then what was life?

Tik-Tok moved away from her again, to stand beside a round marble-topped table. A small yellow porcelain vase sat upon it; he touched the vase, glancing back at Dorothy. “Ready?” he said steadily.

Dorothy nodded.

“Oz!” Tik-Tok cried. And disappeared, as ear-splitting thunder rolled and echoed through the halls.

Darkness! A flash of blue light—darkness again. The lights brightened once more, and Dorothy searched around her desperately for something that had not been there a moment before. But among the thousands of separate ornaments in the dozens of rooms on every side, she could see nothing new, nothing that had changed. She had no idea at all which one of the thousands hid the identity of her faithful friend and Army.

Still sitting on his throne, more nearly human than ever, the Nome King smiled and puffed on his pipe contentedly. “Dorothy Gale,” he murmured to himself, “you’re all that’s left . . .”

Dorothy hugged herself, feeling cold and lost standing all alone now in the vastness of the chamber. She lifted the ribbon of her dress, staring at the stain left there by Tik-Tok’s tear. Raising her head again, she murmured to her vanished friends, “It can’t hurt very much, becoming an ornament. I didn’t hear any of you cry out . . .” She turned blindly, reaching out to make her first choice.

CHAPTER 19

Mombi brought the Wheelers to a sliding stop, as the tunnel's end rose abruptly before them, a wall of solid stone. As the Wheelers screeched to a halt a grim, glaring face formed in the rock, frowning down on them. The Wheelers thrashed and cowered in an agony of fear. Mombi, unintimidated, bashed the nose of the stone face with her staff. "Open up!" she snarled. "Tell him this is important!" The Wheelers cringed behind her, terrified of the face's wrath—more terrified that it would actually give in and let them all pass inside.

Mombi turned to glare at them; realizing, as she looked back, that their hysterical presence would be more of a hindrance than a help to her when she faced the King. "Stay here until I come back!" she ordered sharply.

The Wheelers stayed where they were, panting with pathetic gratitude, as the rock wall flowed open. A brilliant light poured into the tunnel from the other side. Mombi stepped through the opening into the light without hesitation and disappeared.

Inside the Nome King's palace, Dorothy still studied the bewildering array of lifeless ornaments that surrounded her. She felt dizzy just looking at them; how could she ever choose—? She touched an alabaster bowl timidly, and the dizzy feeling grew inside her. Her mouth was so dry she could barely speak; she felt as if she were scarcely even breathing. Closing her eyes, she whispered, "Oz . . ."

There was a distant roll of thunder. Dorothy opened her eyes, and looked at the bowl. It had not changed. Her hand dropped woodenly to her side, and she moved on across the room.

Sitting in his chamber, the Nome King smiled to himself again. "Two guesses left . . ." he muttered. He glanced up, his concentration broken by a commotion coming toward him from an unexpected quarter. Abruptly he saw Princess Mombi come hurrying across the polished obsidian floor, her feathered collar bristling, and his smile grew rock-hard with amusement and disgust.

"Kneel," he ordered.

Mombi obeyed.

"Lower!" he snapped.

Mombi flattened herself hastily, lying nose-to-nose with her reflection on the black, polished mirror.

"LOWER!" he roared, and guffawed as she writhed before him, trying to sink into her own reflection.

Still wandering through the ornament rooms, Dorothy reached out again with uncertain fingers. She touched another object—an ornamental crystal. "Oz . . . !" she breathed.

There was a roll of thunder. The crystal did not change. Dorothy backed away from it, pale and shivering. "One guess left . . ." Her own voice sounded strange and thick.

The Nome King looked up at the sound of distant thunder, but his pleasure at hearing it vanished as he turned his attention back to Mombi, still lying face down on the obsidian floor. "I thought I told you never to use that tunnel unless you had something important for me."

"Dorothy Gale has come back!" Mombi burst out.

The King stared at her, puffing on his pipe. "I know," he chided, with deathly gentleness. "You were supposed to bring her to me."

". . . She stole my ruby key and my Powder of Life! And valuable antiques which she made into a flying sofa! And she is headed this way with . . . with—" Mombi broke off before she could mention the chicken, as the King's words finally registered. "You . . . know . . . ?" Her eyes bulged as she suddenly grasped her terrible mistake. She had arrived too late—a mistake far worse than not coming at all.

"I know *everything!"* the King smiled. "She is already here. But not . . . for much . . . longer!"

At that moment, Dorothy Gale from Kansas decided to leave her final, fatal selection to chance, knowing of no better way. She faced the entrance that led into another room, and closed her eyes. She spun around three times, and then stretched out her arms, walking blindly forward.

Mombi, standing now, and not certain what course to take, played for time. The King seemed in a strangely amiable mood. "Why didn't you just transform them all right away?" she asked.

The King chuckled and waved his pipe. "It's more fun this way."

"But if she guesses right and finds out about Ozma, that could ruin everything."

The King's sharp-edged features softened momentarily when he heard her speak that name, *Ozma.* Some memory stirred within him—or some twisted aspiration. "Ozma . . ." he murmured, then was

suddenly standing, furious, free of the rock for the first time. "OZMA! YOU HAVEN'T LET *HER* ESCAPE AS WELL, HAVE YOU?!"

"No . . . no . . . !" Mombi gasped. "She's still hidden away."

The Nome King's searing crystal gaze relaxed and he settled back on his throne again. "Then there's nothing to worry about. None of the others have guessed right and neither will"—he paused, savoring the words—"Dorothy Gale from Kansas."

Dorothy moved forward, inch by inch, toward a mantel filled with decorative objects. Among them, although she did not see it, was an emerald a big as her fist and cut like a diamond. Her hand reached for it, groping through the air, coming closer . . . closer . . . Her fingers brushed the emerald and, fumbling, knocked it aside. Eyes still closed, she searched the shelf, trying to find it again. But instead her fingers wrapped around the brass owl which sat beside it. With her eyes even more tightly shut, she braced herself for whatever would come when she spoke the final, fatal word.

The Nome King leaned back, savoring his pipe, anticipating the moment when he would have one more, one final ornament for his collection—when he would be completely human at last, and when there would be no living being in the universe who remembered the Land of Oz.

But still Dorothy hesitated. Somehow the thing clutched in her hands did not feel right. She had touched a different thing before; and there had been something about its smooth, cool surface that had made her fingers tingle . . .

Opening her eyes again, she saw the jewel lying on its side. *An emerald.* She set the owl down, and reached out tentatively to touch the gem instead. Closing her eyes once more, she cried, "OZ!"

"Dorothy!"

Dorothy opened her eyes in amazement, as a familiar voice called her name. There, sitting before her on the mantelpiece was the Scarecrow, his round button eyes as wide as her own, a silver crown set with emeralds perched crookedly on his head. Dorothy stood frozen a moment longer, blinking, not quite believing that she was still herself, and seeing what she saw. She had been so sure that her choice would be wrong. Now she collapsed into the Scarecrow's soft, rustling arms. "Oh, Scarecrow!" she murmured, "It's you, and I'm not an ornament after all . . . !"

And this time, instead of thunder, the Nome King heard the distant chime of a bell—the fateful sound that told him a transformation had been broken. Looking down at himself, he saw that he had become suddenly more rocklike, instead of more human. Instead of being free of his imprisoning bonds of rock, he was being reabsorbed; the source of all his awesome power was still his prison. "Smudge and blazes!" he roared. He glared at Mombi—*If it hadn't been for her . . .*

As the Nome King sat fuming, Dorothy and the Scarecrow stood together in the ornament room, considering their own next move. The Nome King had said that she could keep guessing—as long as her guesses were right. She hoped that he was bound as strictly by the rules of this enchanted game as she was. But even more importantly, she hoped she would be able to guess right the next time. If only there were some pattern . . . The Scarecrow was the smartest person in Oz, but when she had asked him, he had only shaken his head, saying, "I don't even remember what *I* was, Dorothy!"

"You were green . . ." Dorothy began. She glanced around them with sudden inspiration. "You were an emerald! Maybe people from Oz turn into *green* ornaments." Each land had its own royal color, and Oz's was green. She waved an arm at the room, and the others beyond. It was only a wild idea, but it was better than no idea at all. Her heart beating fast, she said, "You look in that room and I'll begin in here." The Scarecrow nodded and started away.

The Nome King's face contorted with rage as he sensed them beginning to search again. The vibrations were all wrong now. He pulled his pipe from his mouth and hurled it furiously at the wall. It exploded like a volcano. "Fumes and furnaces!" he swore.

Unaware that he was being watched, the Scarecrow thoughtfully examined another shelf full of ornaments. He peered at a carved elephant—brown, the wrong color. A silver candlestick—no. There were suspiciously few green ornaments anywhere, it struck him.

In the next room, Dorothy searched another mantelpiece, finding nothing green on it—nothing green on an endtable . . .

The Scarecrow scanned a sideboard—and there, in the back row of knick-knacks, lay a green inkwell shaped like a turtle. "Dorothy!" he called.

Dorothy came running into the room. Biting her lip, she touched the inkwell. "OZ!" she said quickly, before she lost her nerve.

Abruptly the Gump was lying on the shelf before them, sending ornaments crashing to the floor around him. The Scarecrow stared at the Gump in amazement, finding his head strangely familiar, but his body utterly unexpected.

Wasting no time, Dorothy said, "Look for green objects, quick! We

still have to find Jack, Tik-Tok, and Billina!" The Gump squirmed down from his perch and stumped away, for once accepting the situation with a minimum of complaint.

The bell chimed again in the Nome King's chamber. The King felt himself reabsorbed into the face of the wall, helplessly growing to monstrous size. "PETRIFIED POLYMORPHS!" he bellowed.

"I told you this might happen!" Mombi grunted.

The King glared down at her with eyes of iron, and Mombi suddenly wished fervently that she had not drawn his attention. "You let her escape!" he grated.

"It wasn't my fault!" Mombi wailed, edging away from the King, whose now monstrous form seemed to double with each word. "You had her and you let her ESCAPE!" he roared, and the cavern shook and boulders cracked.

Mombi lashed out with desperate fury. *"If you'd have given me a real army instead of those ridiculous Wheelers . . . !"* She turned to run.

The King gestured with a massive arm, and Mombi was suddenly surrounded by a cramped cage that resembled a barred coffin. "I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU LATER!" he growled, and Mombi's screams mingled with the grinding of rock as the massive head of the King turned in the wall and moved through the solid rock toward the ornament room.

CHAPTER 20

Dorothy, the Gump, and the Scarecrow raced from room to room, searching for anything green. As they ran, a strange tinkling began in the air around them, growing louder and louder. Dorothy realized suddenly that all the ornaments were quivering on their shelves. Somewhere, something toppled from its table and fell to the floor with a crash. There was another crash behind her. Now the whole room was shaking.

They still had not found Tik-Tok, Jack, and Billina! *If the green ornaments fell and were smashed before they could transform them . . . !* Dorothy thought, her mind racing.

Cracks appeared and spread like a spiderweb over the floor. At the far end of the room the floor suddenly began to rupture, as something enormous began to push its way through from below. The lights flickered and went out, replaced by a ruddy, volcanic glow filled with hissing tendrils of sulphurous steam. Dorothy cried out in terror as the Nome King's enormous stone head burst through the floor, filling the far end of the room. Rocks and debris tumbled across the ruined floor, while more and more of the King's precious collection of ornaments tumbled to the floor and shattered.

The Scarecrow leaped forward as he saw something green plummet from a stand and dove to catch the porcelain vase before it hit the floor. "Dorothy!" he called.

She was already running to his side. Breathless, she touched the vase and cried, "Oz!"

Abruptly Jack appeared in the Scarecrow's arms. The two brothers-in-form gaped at each other with equal surprise.

"STOP!" the Nome King thundered, in a voice that cracked with doom. *"STOP!"* His rage had transformed him into a living volcano, and when he opened his mouth Dorothy could see the reflected flickering of deep distant fires.

Finding her voice again, still hardly believing her eyes, Dorothy shouted over the roar of flames, "We're not finished guessing! You promised that if we guessed correctly . . ."

"I'M TIRED OF GAMES!" the King boomed, and his voice echoed from distant parts of his underground kingdom. "I'M TIRED OF ALL OF YOU! WHY DOESN'T THE *SOFA* . . . GO FIRST?!" As he spoke, his giant arm had reached swiftly forward and grabbed one end of the Gump's body and began drawing it backward toward him.

"Help!" the Gump bellowed, and Dorothy and her friends charged forward and grabbed the Gump's antlers and pulled as hard as they could. For a moment, they were even able to pull him back a few inches. The King shook the floor with his laughter, amused at the presumption of such a puny band. He suddenly yanked the sofa backward with enough force that the curtain cords unravelled and the Gump's head came detached from the sofa as everyone fell in a heap.

They looked up in horror as the King's mouth widened, and then widened more than seemed possible, as the King—still laughing—dropped the sofa down his throat. He closed his mouth with a crunch of splintered wood against stone, then turned his searing gaze on Jack. "NEXT! PUMP-KIN-HEAD!" And his hand reached out again.

"RUN!" Dorothy screamed as they sprang to their feet. The scarecrow, burdened with the Gump's head, ran for the doorway to the nearest room.

Dorothy, Jack, the Scarecrow, and the Gump dodged falling debris and darted around toppling tables, racing for the archway to the nearest room. They plunged through just as it collapsed around them, barely bursting through the cloud of dust in time to avoid being crushed. They stumbled on into the darkness, covered in debris.

The King's evil laughter echoed from everywhere at once. "NOMES! NOMES! NOOOMES!" he roared, in a voice like a foghorn proclaiming doom on the rocks.

Suddenly, Dorothy was terrified to see the walls themselves begin to deform and crumble as legions of living rock beings burst through in answer to the King's call. Huge, contorted nome faces emerged like living gargoyles from the rock, now a writhing mass of mutating horrors.

Dorothy and her friends ran desperately first this way, and then that, but everywhere they went they were stopped by more nomes who reached out for them. The Scarecrow, carrying the Gump's head, could not run as fast as the others, and as he fell behind he was ringed by nomes seething out of the rubble-strewn floor.

Jack, looking back at the Scarecrow, suddenly felt an immense presence looming above him. His head swiveled to see the Nome King's monstrous hand stretching out toward him. Paralyzed by fear, he threw his hands over his eyes. "MOM!" he shouted. Dorothy turned just in time to see the King sweep Jack up and raise him toward his widening mouth. He fixed his cruel, hollow eyes on Dorothy as he taunted her with his booming laugh and lowered Jack slowly down into his volcano throat to join the sofa.

"Mom!" Jack screamed, upside-down, holding on to his head to keep it from slipping off his neck and into the flaming abyss below.

"MOM! HELLLPPP!"

"NO!" Dorothy cried, powerless to prevent her "son" from being consumed before her very eyes.

The Nome King's laughter suddenly caught in his stony throat as he heard a tiny sound that sent shivers through his entire being.

"Kut-kut-kut, ka-daw-kutt!"

The King froze, his face rigid with horror.

"Billina!" Dorothy stared incredulously.

The Nome King looked up at Jack, all his minions staring with him in equal horror as the head of the terrified hen popped out of Jack's eye. Their collective gasp set the caverns moaning: *"A chicken . . . !"*

The King gazed up at the hen, his mouth still agape, frozen with surprise and terror.

All at once the stem-topped cap of Jack's head dropped from its place and fell. And, teetering on the brink of the hole, lay the perfect white sphere of an egg. The egg tumbled out, following Jack's cap down into the bottomless pit of the Nome King's mouth. Too late, his mouth snapped shut, and he swallowed it.

The moaning protest of the watchers grew even louder, "An egg . . . poison! . . . poison! . . . egg! . . . egg! . . . egg! . . ."

For an instant, everyone and everything in the room was as still as stone. Then the Nomes' cries and groans rose again, reaching a crescendo, and the faces disappeared into the walls in a frenzy of panic. Swirling dust filled the ornament rooms with their departure.

Only the King remained, alone, abandoned by his Nomes. A complex play of indecipherable emotions ran across his gray features. After another agonizingly long moment, he set Jack gently down on the floor. "An egg!" he whispered. "Don't . . . you . . . know . . . that eggs . . . are . . . poison?" The ultimate source of life, they were anathema to his soulless being.

Billina fluttered up out of Jack's head and settled on the floor. "Poison, indeed!" she muttered indignantly.

Dorothy watched the King intently; the Scarecrow watched him; Billina watched him—all in breathless silence.

Then all at once the room was filled by one final blinding flash of lightning and a deafening crash of thunder. Blackness and silence followed, stretching on and on. When at last their sight and hearing returned, they found nothing left before them but a pile of broken and fractured stone where the King had been. Dorothy peered through the choking smoke, as something gleamed redly in the rubble. In the midst of the debris lay a pair of glowing ruby slippers, perfectly

unscathed. Dorothy reached out with a trembling hand, pushing aside stones, and picked them up.

As she touched them, the ground began to shake again. This time the earthquake was worse than the last. The ceiling began to crack, with a sound like riflefire; great pieces of limestone came crashing down around them. Pillars toppled like giant trees, and ornaments cascaded from shelves in waterfalls of tinkling debris. Dorothy tore at the laces of her shoes, pulling one from her foot.

“Hurry, Dorothy!” Billina pleaded.

The lights flared and dimmed again. The glow of deep subterranean fires lit the darkness, as molten rock began to well up from below.

Dorothy wrenched the shoe from her other foot, fumbling with the ruby slippers. Her friends crouched around her, clinging to each other; gazing outward at the fires and chaos on every side, as they faced their end in awestruck silence. All except Jack.

Jack pulled at Dorothy’s shoulder, patting his head with his other hand. “Mom,” he said unhappily, “I lost my cap!”

Dorothy looked up at him, blinking and dazed. “I know, Jack,” she gasped. “We’ll fix it when we get home.” The floor rocked crazily beneath them, as she scrambled after a slipper. Spouts of lava burst from the walls and showered into the room like fireworks. Dorothy pushed one slipper onto a foot, and then the other.

She dashed over to her friends and clasped them tightly. “I wish all of us from Oz to return there safely!” she cried. “And the Emerald City and all the people in it to be restored to life!”

She was able to click the heels of her ruby slippers three times before smoke and fire closed around her. There was the rushing sound of a cataclysmic explosion, and Dorothy felt herself falling . . .

CHAPTER 21

One moment the peaceful hilltop that overlooked the ruined Emerald City was perfectly empty. And the next moment it held the sprawled, breathless forms of Dorothy Gale, the Scarecrow, Jack, Billina, and the Gump. They looked around at one another in astonishment, then began to pick themselves up.

"I must say," the Gump remarked, "this life is stranger than my other one!" He looked up, and the others looked up with him, as a high, screaming whistle sounded in the air above them. Suddenly Mombi, still inside her cage, crashed down on the hillside among them. Dorothy stared in amazement, wondering how the witch had followed them here. Then she remembered that she had wished *everyone* from Oz safely home. Cautiously she moved closer to the fallen cage, peering in. Mombi gazed back at her, but the witch's stare was blank.

A great wind rose in the forest behind her, shaking the leaves of the nearby trees, as it began to blow in the direction of the city. The gray, grim ruins began to glow, and then to shimmer with an unmistakable scintillating greenness. Great bars of light fanned outward from the city, radiating like the sun, shot with rainbows.

And somewhere among the city streets, Dorothy's old friend the Tin Woodman shimmered and turned from stone to gleaming tin again. Beside him, his faithful companion, the Cowardly Lion, returned to his richly furred living self. Finding himself in midgrowl, the lion snapped his mouth shut and looked around him in confusion. There were no foes to face in battle, only his tin friend looking back at him with a grin and a relieved, curious shrug. All about them other once-living statues were changing back into flesh and blood, and a great cheer began to rise in the streets as headless dancing girls recovered their beautiful heads.

From the darkness of a hidden doorway, the lead Wheeler peered out at the sound, still gasping from his flight back to the city. He blinked his eyes against the dust and wind, and froze, as he saw the magical transformation taking place around him. Another Wheeler looked out at his side, and another, and finally all the Wheelers whom fate had left alive edged out into the light of day together. They stared in open-mouthed, exhausted wonder, hardly daring to believe that Mombi's reign of terror was over; that the citizens of Oz—and even they—were really free at last.

High on the hilltop, Dorothy gazed down at the resurrected city, its magnificent towers and domes limned with jewels and alive with light. She turned back to her friends, her heart filled with celebration. But suddenly her face fell. "Where's Tik-Tok?"

A blaze of smoky red light on the far horizon startled them, drawing their eyes away from each other, and back toward the Nome King's mountain. They heard the dull thud and rumble of a distant volcanic explosion.

"We never found him!" the Scarecrow cried, as the realization of what was happening back in that underground realm struck them all. Their faces bathed by the ruddy glow of the distant explosion, they stood together in a moment of silence for a comrade fallen in battle and lost forever. Dorothy's lip trembled. "Oh, Tik-Tok . . ." she murmured brokenly.

A great gulping sob echoed inside Jack's head. "Tik-Tok . . ." he whispered.

The Gump stood silent and subdued, still staring at the mountain, with Billina perched between his antlers. The Gump shook his head sadly, and Billina glanced down, as a bright flash of light attracted her sharp hen's eye. A beautifully inscribed medal rimmed with emeralds was still caught among the points of his antler. "Where did you get that?" Billina asked.

"Get what?" The Gump rolled his eye. Jack picked the medal from his antler and held it up for him to see. The others gathered around, looking on in curiosity. "It must have come from the ornament collection," the Gump said.

Everyone stared at the medal, and the realization grew in all their minds at once, although no one spoke it; the medal was made of polished copper.

Dorothy reached out almost reluctantly to touch the medal. She swallowed, afraid to speak the word that rose in her throat, for fear that she was wrong, that the medal might be only a medal after all.

"Go on, Dorothy," the Scarecrow urged gently.

Dorothy took a deep breath. "Oz!" she said.

Then, suddenly, Tik-Tok was standing among them. His head swiveled a complete three hundred and sixty degrees as he took them all in, along with his unexpected surroundings. Seeing the Scarecrow, his King, he drew himself up and saluted smartly. "Your Majesty! My thinking must have com-pletely wound down. I do not remem-ber leaving the Nome King-dom."

"You were enchanted," Dorothy said. She threw her arms around Tik-Tok, hugging him tightly, as she had done just before they were parted, when she had been certain they would never see one another

again. “But it’s all right now—everything’s all right!”

CHAPTER 22

The citizens of Oz gathered from miles around in the newly awakened and resplendent Emerald City. They gathered there to celebrate its restoration, and the liberation of their land from the Nome King's tyranny. But most of all, they gathered to hail the return of their heroes. Crowds lined the sparkling emerald-bright streets to watch the royal parade, all dressed in their finest, brightest holiday clothes. Bands played; fireworks exploded across the sky; balloons and flowers were everywhere. A great cheer spread through the streets as the conquerors of the Nome King appeared, heading a triumphant procession toward the royal palace.

Billina led the parade, riding high in the air atop a silken pillow on a palanquin. The key she had found in Kansas hung around her neck, suspended from a velvet ribbon. The breeze ruffled her golden feathers as she swelled her chest with pride, waving a wing awkwardly at the joyous watchers who lined the way.

Tik-Tok came next, his once-battered and tarnished body gleaming like polished gold. Behind him the Gump, freed of his humiliating sofa body, was mounted proudly on the front of a chariot. And then came Dorothy herself, riding by on the back of the Cowardly Lion; the cheering grew even louder. The Cowardly Lion held his head high, his mane neatly groomed for the occasion and tied with a blue ribbon bow; Dorothy waved and smiled, infecting the crowd with her happiness and delight. On one side of her walked the Tin Woodman and on the other the Scarecrow, his body carefully restuffed, a rich cloak covering his own homely garments. They joined their hands and lifted them above Dorothy's head, in a shared salute to their valiant young friend and the people they loved.

Jack followed next, wearing a rakish new cap that had been carefully carved to fit his head. The parade passed a group of young women wearing Grecian-style costumes who were moving gracefully through the patterns of a dance. One of them turned to toss Jack a flower. Catching it, he recognized the dancers as the young women whose heads had been stolen by Mombi—all of them now restored to wholeness, like the rest of the kingdom. "Which one were you?" he asked.

"Number Twenty-two!" the dancer cried. She leaped high in celebration, as she turned and saw who followed him. Mombi was the next focus of the crowd's attention. The cheers turned to shouts and

booing as she passed, a helpless, scowling old woman in a cage, carried by the Royal Guards of Oz. Her bedraggled clothing was as striking a contrast to the elegant emerald and gold of the Guardsmen's uniforms as it had once been when she was the only thing of beauty in a dim, dead city.

The royal procession, and as many guests as could be squeezed in, assembled in the palace as the parade ended. The culmination of the day's festivities was to be the re-coronation of the Scarecrow as King, presided over by Dorothy and his closest friends. Even the Gump, bedecked with ribbons and hanging high on a mirrored wall, was given a place of honor from which to watch.

The Scarecrow swept back his royal cape, revealing the threadbare clothing of a scholar beneath it. Wearing his perennial good-natured smile, he settled down on his throne, which had so recently held Mombi's many-headed form instead. Dorothy stood at his side, holding his crown in the crook of an arm. She raised her other hand, and the murmuring crowd fell silent, watching.

As Dorothy lifted the crown to place it on the Scarecrow's hay-stuffed brow, the Scarecrow suddenly shook his head, rustling softly. "Wait . . ."

Dorothy drew the crown back and down. "What's the matter?" she asked.

The Scarecrow rose slowly from the throne. "I was never meant to be King, Dorothy," he murmured. "I have the brains for it, but not the heart. Besides, the crown hurts my head and makes it difficult to think."

Dorothy looked at him in surprise. She glanced around the vast room at the expectant crowd. "Well, who is to rule if you don't?" She saw so many faces, some of them familiar, most of them strangers—the Woodman and the Lion, Tik-Tok, Jack, the Munchkins, the Wheelers, a girl dressed in rainbows, another made entirely of patchwork, a man in a baker's high hat—a dizzying array of unique and wonderful beings, who all lived together in one land. But who among them was suited to rule them all with understanding and justice—?

The Scarecrow smiled at her. "Stay here and rule over us, Dorothy."

She turned back to him, her eyes wide. "Me?"

"Yes!" the Tin Woodman cried enthusiastically. "Be the Queen of Oz!"

The cry was caught up by the watchers, and the crowd began to shout, "Yes . . . Queen of Oz! Dorothy! . . . Dorothy!"

Dorothy stood in silence before them, waiting until they had all grown quiet again. Her heart was so full of feeling that she thought it

might burst, and her eyes were bright with tears as she blinked and blinked. At last she said softly, "You're the best friends anyone's ever had. But I have to go back. I'm sure Aunt Em and Uncle Henry are worrying about me."

"And Toto," Billina reminded her gently.

"Oh!" Dorothy cried. "I'd forgotten about Toto." Toto had shared her whole journey through Oz the first time; and this time she had not even thought about him once. Suddenly her eyes brimmed over with tears of guilt and grief, as she thought of him waiting, pining for her, in lonely, distant Kansas. "He believes in Oz, so I can tell him all the things that have happened and all the wonderful people I've met." At least this time she would have someone who would listen to her stories and not call them lies.

Tik-Tok and Jack moved close to her side, reaching out to comfort her. She smiled at them, then looked up into Jack's grinning face. She thought of his becoming an orphan again if she returned to Kansas and felt her heart squeezed with sorrow.

"We understand, Dorothy," Jack murmured.

"Do you?" She could never tell what was truly hidden behind his smile. "Oh, I wish I could be in both places at the same time!" As she heard the words form in the air between them, Dorothy looked down suddenly at her feet. She was still wearing the ruby slippers, which had the power to make any wish come true—

"Look!" Billina cried. "In the mirror!"

Dorothy glanced up. There, in the mirror, standing between Tik-Tok and Jack where her own reflection ought to be, was another young girl, dressed in the clothing of a princess. Silence fell again in the room as Dorothy walked slowly away from the throne toward the mirrored wall. The reflection came toward her, imitating her every movement as if it were herself. "Why, it's me . . ." Dorothy whispered in wonder, ". . . but it's *not* me!"

The girl in the mirror did look very much like her—but she wore robes of white silken gauze that floated about her like a cloud, twinkling with stars of silver and emerald green. Her long hair, which was ruddy gold instead of dark brown, was held in place by a circlet of gold, with the symbol of Oz on her forehead; a large white blossom was woven into it above each ear. On her feet she wore satin slippers instead of ruby ones. But as Dorothy drew closer to the mirror, she began to realize that not only did the other young girl move as if she were Dorothy herself—her face was actually familiar. She was the girl who was also Dr. Worley's prisoner, who had been lost in the river, back in Kansas.

Dorothy stopped before the mirror. "Hello . . ." she said shyly. "I

was afraid you had drowned."

The girl in the mirror smiled, a sad and mysterious smile. For a moment she neither moved nor spoke, standing as still as Dorothy now stood. At last she said, "Help me step through the glass, Dorothy."

Wonderingly, Dorothy held out her hand to the surface of the mirror. The reflection's hand stretched to meet her own. Their fingers came closer—closer—and at last they touched. The glass rippled like a pool of mercury. And all at once the other girl stepped through the glass, as if it were not even there, and into the throne room.

The crowd looked on in wonder, murmuring its amazement as the people of Oz stared at the two girls standing side-by-side, where there had been only one before.

"You are so beautiful . . ." Dorothy murmured in awe to the other girl. "What is your name?"

"Ozma," the girl answered softly.

"Mom!" Jack shouted from across the room. He fell to the floor in a clattering faint. Dorothy looked at Ozma in curiosity and surprise.

Suddenly a voice from the back of the hall called out, "She *is* Ozma! Queen and rightful ruler of Oz!" The crowd parted, as everyone turned to stare at the speaker. The woman who had spoken was one of the court dancers, who had until recently been Mombi's Head Number Four. She stood beside Mombi's cage and called out through the crowd, "Her father was Pastoria, King of Oz before the Wizard came. He sold his daughter—Ozma—to Mombi in exchange for a potion which guaranteed eternal life. But when he realized what he had done, he was so ashamed that he killed himself out of remorse."

"—which was a waste of good potion," Mombi muttered disgustedly.

The other dancers, whose heads had shared Mombi's dark thoughts and remembered all her evil activities as Princess of Oz, gathered around their friend as she went on with her story. "Ozma grew up as Mombi's slave, but when the Nome King promised Mombi thirty beautiful heads and the Emerald City if she kept Ozma a secret, she enchanted her into the mirror."

Jack, who had recovered from his swoon, climbed to his feet and stood beside Ozma, holding her hand in his, reunited with his real creator at last. Ozma's smile was nearly as wide as his own. "I forgive Mombi," Ozma said. "A witch with no magic is a miserable creature indeed."

"That is a fact!" Mombi said, her voice rueful and her eyes glowering.

Everyone else in the room burst into cheers at that, their shouts echoing, “Ozma! Queen of Oz! Hurray!”

Dorothy led Ozma to the waiting throne that was hers by right, the throne on which she had almost seen someone else crowned again in her place, while she looked on helplessly through the mirror. The Scarecrow lowered the crown carefully onto her head, as the crowd went on cheering in celebration. Then Dorothy removed the ruby slippers and put them on Ozma’s feet. They fit Ozma as perfectly as they had fit her own feet; but she knew that they, and the magic powers they held, would be safe forever. Getting to her feet again, Dorothy curtsied and said quietly, “Now, please wish me back to Kansas.”

Ozma smiled, nodding. “On one condition: I will look in on you from time to time, and if you ever wish to return to Oz, I will make it so.”

Dorothy’s face filled with sudden joy, as she realized that at last her true wish had been granted—that she would be able to share the things she loved with the people she loved in Kansas and in Oz too. Looking back at her twin, she knew now that her bond to Oz was far more mysterious—and far stronger—than she had ever dreamed. She *did* belong in both places. And now she would not have to give up one or the other forever and feel herself forever torn in two with longing. She gazed at the circle of her friends again; but now a mist seemed to be rising around her, filling the air, making all she saw seem dim and dreamlike. Her friends drew closer, smiling and waving, their eyes showing her the same mixture of joy and sorrow that she felt in her own heart. “Good-bye, Dorothy,” Billina called, shaking her head as Dorothy reached out to catch her up.

“You’re not coming back, Billina?” Dorothy asked, dismayed.

“No—” Billina said emphatically. She shook her head until her wattles quivered. “And I must say, Dorothy my dear, that you are foolish to want to go back into that stupid humdrum world again.” The mist grew thicker, until Dorothy could barely see her, or anyone else.

“Oh no!” Dorothy cried, as she realized all at once that they had truly reached the time of parting. “I mean . . . I didn’t expect to go so soon. I haven’t really said good-bye yet.”

Her friends reached out together to touch her lightly in farewell. Hands were all she could see of them now—a soft gloved hand, a copper hand, a lion’s paw, a hen’s wing, a tin hand, three stick fingers . . .

“Good-bye, everyone,” Dorothy murmured, her throat tight. “I’ll never forget you all . . .” The light around her was dazzling now,

reflecting in the mirrored walls, the wall of mist. Dorothy covered her eyes with her hands. “Oh . . . I can’t see—”

“Good-bye, Dorothy!” The light seemed to sing with a thousand voices bidding her farewell. “Good-bye!”

“Oh, I love you all . . .” she cried, feeling as if her heart were breaking after all. “Good-bye . . . Good-bye.” She waved and waved, although she was no longer sure there was anyone at all to see her, as waves of dazzling magic wove her into their spell and swept her away like the tide.

CHAPTER 23

High above the river the morning fog swirled with the breeze, already beginning to melt away beneath the bright sun of a new day. Patches of blue sky and winking rays of sunlight broke through the eddying mist. The sun glinted on the water among the green reeds, rushes, and the brown, stiff cattails. The world was at peace. Then, abruptly, an unseen disturbance somewhere in the clouds set the geese and ducks below to honking and fluttering in the shallows, as if a breath of strange magic had sent ripples through reality to disturb their resting place. After an endless moment of tingling otherness, the geese settled down again to their shoreline browsing; time and the air seemed to slow and sigh, as the riverbank returned to a normal sunny autumn morning.

Dorothy opened her eyes. A tiny twig drifted by, inches from her nose, in the swirling brown water that gurgled and whispered along the shore's edge. She watched it with wonder, as if the whole world were contained in that one tiny bit of wood. The long morning shadows of the grass lay across the stretch of sunlit meadow that was the riverbank. A patch of sunshine touched her cheek, like a remembered touch of farewell. "Good-bye," she whispered, as the last wisps of another world cleared from her vision.

A sudden shifting of light and shadows caught her eye, and she lifted her head slowly, blinking. She saw a meadowlark perched on a cattail, its body bobbing gently, silhouetted against the bright sky. The lark sang, its head lifted to the sun, its breast quivering; the warbling song was like a joyous greeting, welcoming her back into the world. When it had finished its song, the lark launched into the air again, soaring exultantly away into the new day. Dorothy lay still again, exhausted but smiling, letting her eyes wander further, following the length of her outstretched arm. Her hand lay in the chilly shallows of the river; the water tugged insistently at her fingers, as if urging her to stir herself. She pulled her arm back, hugging it to her body to warm her hand, still moving as if she were in a dream. Her clothing was wet and clammy, but drying now in the sun. She heard the lark sing again, somewhere farther on. And then, even more distant, she heard a dog bark. Something stirred in her memory. The dog barked again, and suddenly Dorothy pushed herself up from the grass. The world solidified around her in a rush—*Kansas.* She was really back in Kansas. And she recognized that bark: "Toto," she whispered. "Toto!"

she cried, pushing her wet, muddy hair back from her eyes.

The barking changed abruptly from curious to joyful, and grew louder and nearer. She saw the reeds and grasses dance along the riverbank, as an eager, invisible body came hurtling toward her through them. Rising onto her knees, Dorothy waited, her arms outstretched, her face beaming.

Suddenly Toto was all over her, splashing in the water, licking her laughing face with a frantic tongue, darting around her, barking and barking. And now she heard other voices as well, human voices shouting her name.

"Dorothy! Dorothy!"

Footsteps followed Toto's path, splashing through puddles and snapping the underbrush. Uncle Henry burst into the clearing, skidding to a stop as he saw Dorothy sitting in the grass before him. He fell to his knees beside her, pulling her into his arms. "Dorothy! Oh, Dorothy!" he cried, hugging her so tightly that he squeezed the breath out of her.

"Toto found me . . ." Dorothy murmured, catching her breath, still dazed by the speed with which everything was happening. She hugged her uncle back, comforted by the solid reality of his arms.

"We'd given up hope . . . we'd given up all hope," he whispered. But he had never given up searching.

"I was all right," Dorothy answered softly, because it seemed that way to her, now that she really was.

Rousing himself, Uncle Henry called out, "She's here!" More footsteps came toward them through the brush, and quickly they were surrounded by other members of the search party: farmers and their sons, men in overalls and slickers, unshaven and bleary-eyed, but all equally happy now.

Another figure pushed through the assembled men, and Dorothy saw Aunt Em hurrying toward her. Her aunt threw a warm blanket around her shoulders, then caught Dorothy and Uncle Henry both in a long, loving hug filled with gratitude and thanksgiving. Sitting back on her heels again, Aunt Em covered her mouth with her hands. The corners of her eyes crinkled with her smile, and tears ran down her cheeks.

Leaning forward again, she caught Dorothy up in her arms. Holding her beloved niece close, Aunt Em carried Dorothy back up the slope, supported by Uncle Henry's arm around her waist. The search party made way for them quietly; but some of the weary men reached out to pat Dorothy gently as she passed, proving to themselves that they had really found her, and she was truly all right. Toto circled around his family, barking in delight, leaping into the air.

Several wagons waited with patient horses hitched to their traces on a dirt track that ran alongside the river. Uncle Henry lifted Dorothy into the buggy and onto Aunt Em's lap and settled her there, still wrapped in the blanket. Dorothy looked on along the the road, seeing the distant edge of Cottonwood Falls, and the charred remains of Dr. Worley's clinic outlined against the blue autumn sky. She looked down at her aunt, her face questioning.

Aunt Em followed her glance, looked back at her again. "Lightning," she said soberly. "Everyone was rescued except Dr. Worley, who went back in to save his machines." Her voice was even, but tinged with bitterness.

Another horse and wagon came toward them down the road. Dorothy saw that the man who drove it was a police officer, dressed in a dark uniform. The officer touched his tall black helmet as he saw the little girl, with her rescuers gathered around her. He smiled. "Glad to see you, Miss."

"Hello," Dorothy said shyly.

"This is Dorothy," Uncle Henry said, patting her shoulder.

"Any sign of the other one?" the officer asked.

Uncle Henry shook his head. "No. Half the party has gone on further down, looking." He glanced away, and back at his wife.

"God willing they'll find her too, poor thing," Em said.

The police officer nodded. "Amen." He clucked to his horses, touching his hat again respectfully as he started past. ". . . Morning, all."

Dorothy watched the van pass by. She started suddenly. Sitting in the back of the van, behind bars, was Nurse Wilson. She glared darkly, but said nothing as she was taken away. Dorothy shuddered, watching her go. And then she turned back as Toto leaped up into her lap and Uncle Henry climbed up beside her—warm and safe again in the loving company of her family. Uncle Henry started their own horse moving, for the long but perfectly normal journey home.

The next few days spun past in a dizzying rush for Dorothy, as neighbors came by to wish her well and ask after her health, and then stayed to help her uncle work on the farmhouse. There had been little time in which to talk alone with her aunt or uncle, and in her heart she knew that perhaps it was just as well. She had told Toto all about Oz when they were alone in the darkness after she had gone to bed; and he had been an attentive and eager audience, even if he had had little to say about her adventures. Aunt Em and Uncle Henry believed she had been carried off in the flood and lost, and that was all they

would ever believe. Perhaps it was enough, after all; knowing what grief and worry that had caused them. If they had known about and believed all that had happened to her in Oz, they would certainly have worried far more.

Dorothy sat on her bed with Toto in her cozy new upstairs room, which had been nothing but empty space at the top of a flight of stairs for so long. Now Uncle Henry, with the help of his neighbors, had finished the room at last, and it was all her own.

"Well, I drove back home and old Hen—after I left you at the clinic—I told Hen all about it." Aunt Em's voice drifted up the stairs to her; her aunt had been talking to her while she worked downstairs. "And he said, 'No.' Just that simple: 'No'—like he does when he's made up his mind." Her aunt was kneading a loaf of fresh bread down in the kitchen, in the first quiet afternoon they had had in more than a week. Now that they had time alone, she was finally sharing her thoughts and feelings about all that had happened with Dorothy. " 'Course I can't say I wasn't having second thoughts of my *own* on the way back . . ." she said, her voice tinged with guilt now.

Dorothy looked out the tall window by her bedside at the view of the prairie and the sky.

"Anyway, we hitched up and turned right around, dark as it was. Drove all night, it seemed. The storm had come up by then."

"What about Uncle Henry's leg?" Dorothy asked suddenly. She had noticed that he no longer limped; just as she no longer lay awake at night, longing for things that were lost.

"You know, I haven't heard a word about it," her aunt said, after a moment of realization. "He walks around like it never happened."

Dorothy watched as her uncle walked by below with another piece of siding and began to nail it to the outside wall of the house. She heard him humming to himself through a mouthful of nails. Chickens pecked and scratched in the yard around him, hunting for grubs. Billina was not among them. Dorothy could hardly blame the hen for preferring her new life in Oz . . .

She thought again suddenly of her own last farewell, and of Ozma's promise. Since she had come home to Kansas, there had been no sign from Oz anywhere. How would Ozma know if she wanted to go back? How could she tell her—?

Dorothy turned back to look around her new room again. She slid down off of her bed and crossed the room to her dresser, looking at the solid, oak-framed mirror on a pivot resting above it. She thought of Ozma, imprisoned in the mirrored walls of Mombi's palace.

"It's a shame about that other little girl," Aunt Em remarked, from downstairs. "What was her name?"

Dorothy gazed at herself in the mirror, seeing her own reflection, and remembering the moment when she had looked at herself and seen someone else there, someone so like her that it could have been her sister. "Ozma," she said.

"What's that?" Aunt Em called.

Dorothy glanced toward the doorway. "I don't know, Aunt Em," she said wistfully.

"Still a shame . . ." Aunt Em murmured. "Do you know that Dr. Worley had people locked up in the basement? People who'd been damaged by his machine."

Dorothy tilted the mirror up toward the ceiling, absently watching her reflection slide away.

". . . to think I left you there. What must have been going through my mind? Oh, dear . . ." Downstairs Aunt Em shook her head, still wondering how she could have been so taken in by a dangerous charlatan. Thinking a moment too long about what had almost happened, she wiped at her suddenly blurring eyes with a bare arm—her hands were floury—and silently thanked the Lord.

Dorothy said nothing, knowing Dr. Worley's true nature, which had been far more monstrous and more powerful than her aunt would ever realize—or believe, even if she told her. She sighed and watched the spot of sunlight reflected by the mirror as it danced across the ceiling. She pushed the mirror back to its upright position, and looked at her reflection again. She gasped.

Standing in the place of her reflection was Ozma, in a field of radiant light, smiling back at her. Ozma held Billina in her arms; the hen ruffled her feathers contentedly.

Toto sat up on the bed abruptly, tilting his head, his ears cocked.

"Aunt Em!" Dorothy cried. "Aunt Em! Come and look!" At last, at last, her aunt would be able to see that Oz existed, too!

"What is it, darling?" her aunt's voice called calmly. "I'm busy."

But as Dorothy opened her mouth to answer, Ozma put a finger to her own lips, smiling, and shook her head gently. Dorothy smiled back, a little sadly, but understanding. This was to be her secret, as it had always been. Not everyone was meant to visit Oz . . .

She heard her aunt's footsteps on the stairs and tilted the mirror up again quickly. "Just a reflection, Aunt Em," she called, instead of the answer she had been meaning to say.

Her aunt appeared in the doorway, wiping her hands on her apron. She looked at the bright beam of light spread across the ceiling, and smiled. "Nice to have your own room, isn't it?" she said. "Put the mirror straight now, that's not for playing."

Dorothy hesitated, uncertain, and then tipped the mirror. She let her breath out in a small sigh as she found only herself and her aunt reflected in it.

Aunt Em nodded and glanced at Toto. “Go on, you two, go out and play. Too nice a day to stay inside.”

Dorothy turned to gaze at her aunt, filled with more love and joy at the same time than she ever remembered feeling all at once in her life. She hugged her aunt with all her strength and then ran down the stairs, giggling. Toto leaped off the bed and followed her, barking his excitement.

They ran out into the yard together, scattering chickens, stopping to watch Uncle Henry nail another piece of siding to the wall. The new house was almost finished, just in time for winter. The echoes of her uncle’s hammering rang out across the prairie under the endless blue sky, disappearing into the distance, reaching almost as far as a little girl’s dreams.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joan D. Vinge, one of the most popular movie novelizers today, is an SF author in her own right. Her novel *The Snow Queen* was awarded the Hugo. Her storybook for *Return of the Jedi* was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for months. She lives in a suburb of New York City with her husband James Frenkel, publisher of Bluejay Books, and their daughter.

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